No.92 JAN/FEB '22 £6.50

Little White Lies

TRUTH & MOVIES

Crossword Puzzle #7651

Set by Mr Zero

Super EXTRA

Across

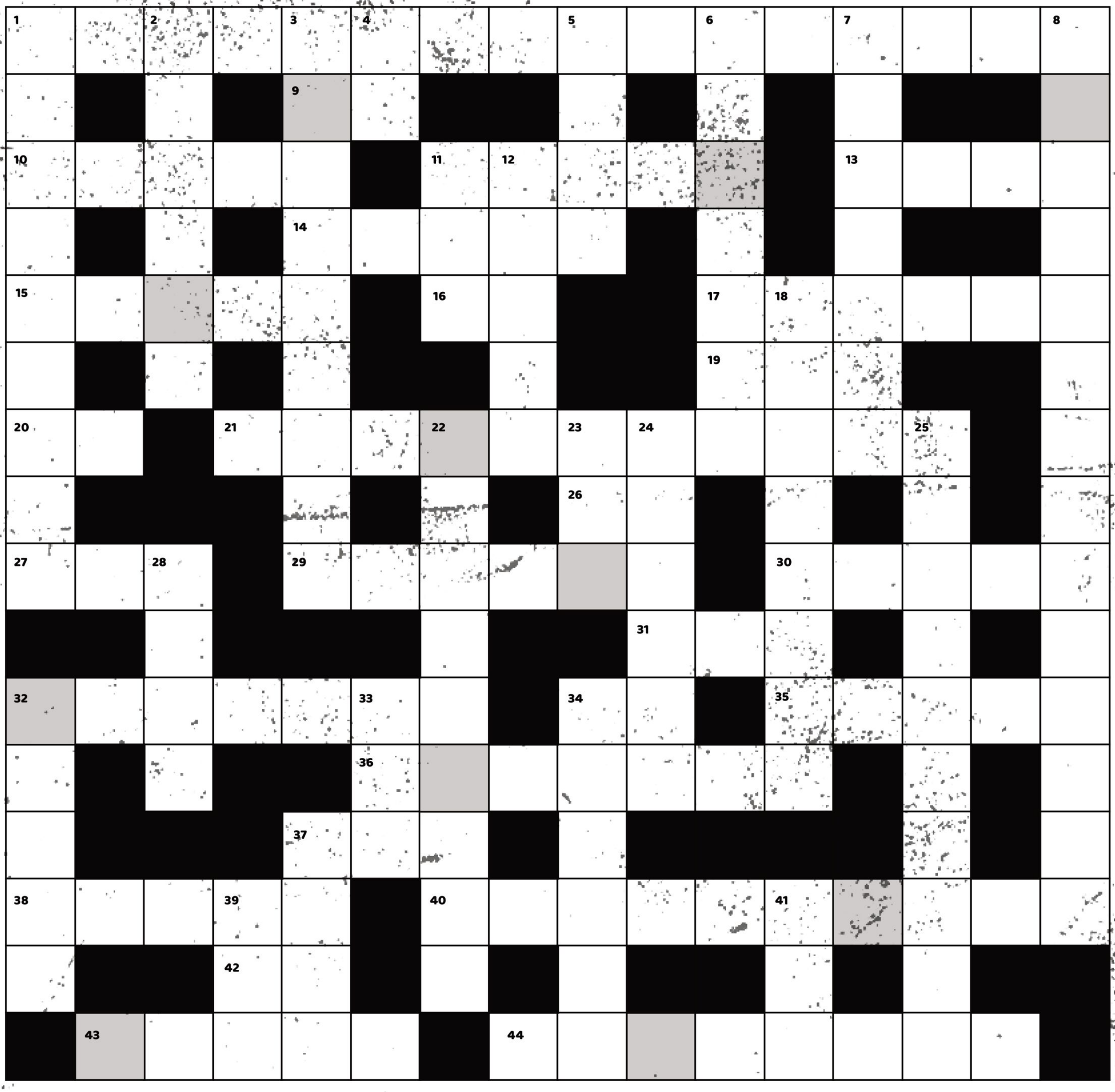
1. PTA's explosive adaptation of Upton Sinclair's 'Oil!' (5,4,2,5)
9. Acclaimed LP by PTA collaborator Joanna Newsom (2)
10. PTA regular Julianne (5)
11. Sadly missed brother of PTA leading man Joaquin Phoenix (5)
12. Deluge, like that of frogs at the climax of *Magnolia* (4)
14. Provided by Jon Brion or Jonny Greenwood? (5)
15. ----- cut: first assembly, or 1980 heist flick with PTA alum Burt Reynolds (5)
16. Chilean drama from Pablo Larraín, whose 2021 film *Spencer* was soundtracked by Greenwood (2)
17. What the characters of PTA's feature debut *Hard Eight* love to do (6)
19. Mr Sunday, saintlike antagonist of 1 across (3)
20. see 23 down
21. Comedy superstar who played the pudding-obsessed romantic lead in 32 down
26. (and 32 across) 1952 Max Ophüls masterpiece beloved of PTA (2, 7)
27. see 18 down
29. Area of PTA's hometown that includes Century City and Rancho Park (4,1,1)
30. (and 28 down) "I have a love in my life. It makes me stronger than anything you can imagine." Hero played by 21 across in 32 down (5,4)
31. British ensemble who made music for *The Master* and *Phantom Thread* (abbr) (1,1,1)
32. see 26 across
34. Nickname of the city that hosted the North American premiere of *The Master* (abbr) (1,1)
35. ----- *Boonmee Who Can Recall his Past Lives*: another PTA favourite (5)
36. Makeshift drinking vessel employed by Freddie Quell in the opening scenes of *The Master* (7)
37. Actress Melissa, who appeared alongside PTA alum Mark Wahlberg in *The Fighter* (3)
38. Blink-and-you'll-miss-it role, like Robert Downey Sr's in *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia* (5)
40. Creamy beverages metaphorically name-dropped in the final scene of 1 across (9)
42. PTA's home state (abbr) (2)
43. see 32 down
44. The type of vice endemic to PTA's Pynchon adaptation (8)

Down

1. Oscar-nominated cock-respecter (3,6)
2. Bible chapter referenced throughout *Magnolia* (6)
3. Make-up liberally applied by 10 across in *Boogie Nights* (3, 6)
4. Middle initials of the other Paul Anderson (1,1)
5. see 32 down
6. Emotional state regularly experienced by 30 across (7)
7. *The Man From* -------, 1955 Jimmy Stewart western cited as a favourite by PTA (7)
8. Plainview; Woodcock; legend (6,3,5)
11. L --- Hubbard, cult founder and inspiration behind *The Master* (3)
12. Actor Jeremy, who in 2018 appeared onstage in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* with PTA alum Lesley Manville (5)
18. (and 27 across) Bitter Bette Davis classic that was a key inspiration for *Phantom Thread* (3,5,3)
22. Foraged foodstuffs fed to Reynolds Woodcock (9)
23. (and 20 across) '--- -- well', the ancient Hindu meaning of the swastika symbol according to 44 across (3,2)
24. Kevin, comic actor and regular collaborator with 21 across (6)
25. Actor from a famous family who once faced invading aliens alongside PTA regular Joaquin Phoenix (3,6)
28. see 30 across
32. (and 43 across and 5 down) PTA's swoon-inducing fourth feature, shot in LA and Hawaii (5,5,4)
33. "You got to shave one testicle, then all the crabs go over to the other testicle. You got to light the hair on fire on that one, and when they all go scurrying out, you take an ---pick and you fucking stab every single last one of them." (3)
34. Comic actress Lily, member of the ensemble casts of PTA faves *Nashville* and *Short Cuts* (6)
37. Breed of shark played by Peter McRobbie in 44 across (4)
39. Camera angle employed by PTA in *Phantom Thread*'s sewing scenes, among others (abbr) (1,1,1)
40. Futuristic romance starring Joaquin Phoenix (3)

Anagram:

Reassemble the shaded squares to form the secret keyword, then Tweet it to @LWLies.



Answers to Crossword Puzzle #7650

Across: 1. Brie, 2. Camembert, 4. Pecorino, 7. Babybel, 10. Gouda, 11. Monteray Jack, 12. Paneer, 15. Passendale, 18. Danish Blue, 22. Comté, 26. Emmental, 28. Saint-Marcellin, 30. Red Leicester.
Down: 1. Gruyère, 4. Roquefort, 7. Feta, 9. Burrata, 11. Caciocavallo 14. Reblochon, 18. Fior di latte, 25. Raclette, 27. Gorgonzola, 29. Jarlsberg
Anagram Keyword: "Nightmares"

‘The Hireling’ (Alan Bridges, UK, 1973) 108 mins, Rated A

Robert Shaw, Sarah Miles, Peter Egan

Sarah Miles was awarded a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for her role as miserable waif Lady Franklin in Alan Bridges’ film about the impossibility of love transcending the class divide. Set in the pretty English spa town of Bath, where moisture seems to hang perpetually in the air, the film sees worldly chauffeur Ledbetter (Shaw) cosying up to the grieving Franklin who has just been released from a sanitarium following a breakdown – the result of the sudden death of her husband. The broad-shouldered, lovable brute, who teaches kids how to box in his down time, starts to believe that he may be in with a chance with this sad-eyed dowager. She reciprocates the fondness he extends to her, and seems happy to champion the various working class causes to which he is attached. Yet this is the love that cannot be, as to breach the class divide would be to sully social convention, and everything goes horribly wrong. Lips quiver, tea is spilled, country cottages are ram-raided… It’s a simple, purposeful drama of English reserve which doesn’t quite ever feel more than a soap opera with posh accents. ***JG***

Plays Wide

WHAT’S ON AT THE CINEMA THIS WEEK?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **LA OPENINGS, FROM FRIDAY** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

‘This House Is Haunted’ (Rutger J. Blok, US/CZ, 1972) 87 mins, Rated GP

Martin Landau, Barra Grant, Gary Valentine

Made under the strained auspices of Czechoslovakia’s generous albeit restrictive new tax loophole for film productions, ‘This House Is Haunted’ sees Dutch journeyman Rutger Blok (‘Sir, Have You Seen My Penguin?’) decamping to the outskirts of Prague for this feisty family frolic about a townhouse inhabited by the ghost of Thomas Edison. Landau brings the funnies with his perma-cantankerous take on the epochal inventor, and you’ll find it hard not to emit a small titter when he delivers his catchphrase, “This is actually the worst I’ve ever felt!”. Elsewhere, Barra Grant combines booksmarts and bikinis as the freelance paranormal investigator with a double major from Suntan College, Reno. The whole enterprise feels a little like it was shot on the lam, with scenes either cutting off before their natural end or dragging on to interminable lengths with the actors apparently believing the camera to have stopped rolling. In one particularly egregious blooper, Landau can be seen in the background taking a nip from a bottle of Buckfast. Shoddy craft aside (we’ve come to expect this from Blok), there’s a delightful turn from apple-cheeked newcomer Gary Valentine as Roger Manwaring, the chatterbox boy next door who’s obsessed with custard and is the only one who can see Edison. If you’ve caught everything else, this one certainly does more than pass the time. Just. ***JG***

Select Cinemas

‘Terminal Island’ (Stephanie Rothman, US, 1973) 99 mins, Rated X

Don Marshall, Phyllis Davis, Ena Hartman

‘Terminal Island’ is billed as the place where humanity leaves its garbage – not somewhere you’d expect to go for a quickie sun holiday. Murderers who escape death row are spirited to this remote patch of terrain in the sea where they’re allowed to fend for themselves, with no chains, no walls and no rules. Hierarchy develops, the strong (men) dominate the weak (women), but it’s not long before revolution is being cooked up on the rolling mudflats of this grimey hellhole. Stephanie Rothman’s violent and tremendously horny opus is fuelled with cheapjack energy and a set of performances that refuse to pander to the camp or ironic. The material is played at face value and thus the dramatic stakes are often a little higher than expected, particularly in a movie which looks like it cost a few hundred dollars and a casket of stock footage to make. Worth a trip after a few boilermakers and some salty fixins. ***JG***

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10 CRITICS CHOICE AWARDS NOMINATIONS INCLUDING BEST PICTURE · BEST DIRECTOR JANE CAMPION · BEST ACTOR BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH

★★★★★ The Telegraph ★★★★★ The Guardian ★★★★★ THE TIMES ★★★★★ BBC CULTURE

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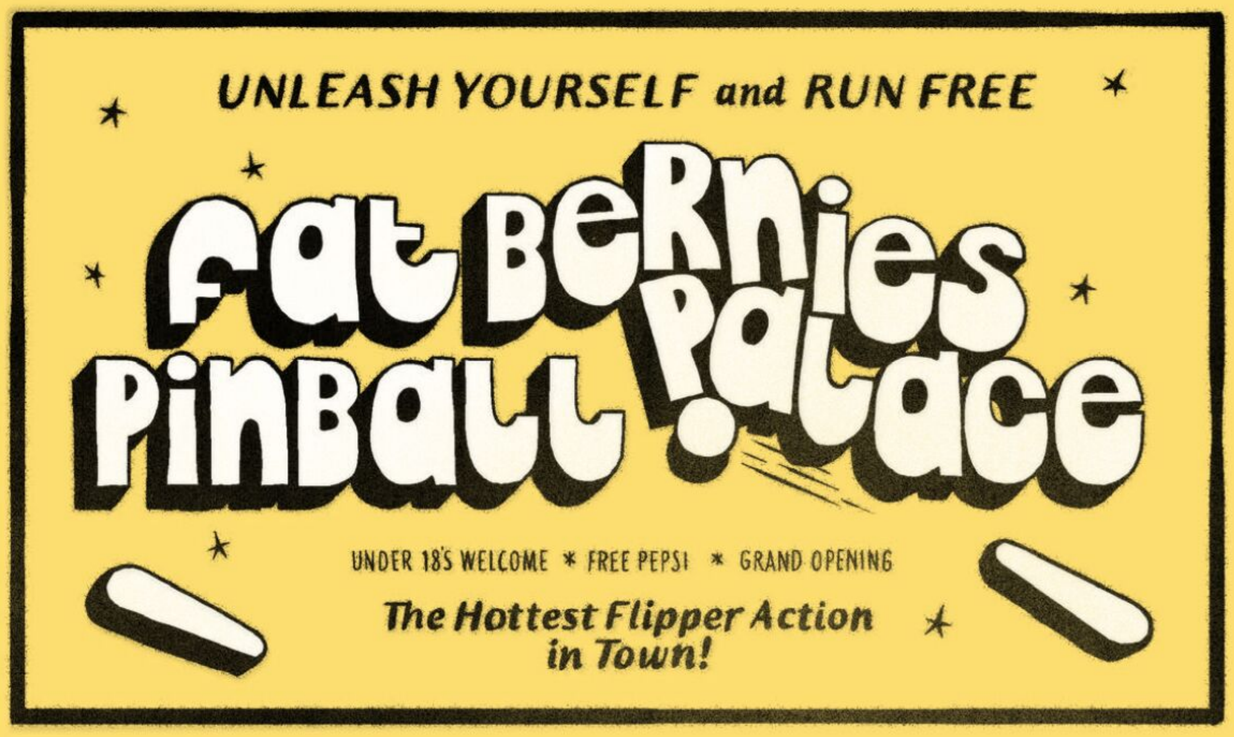

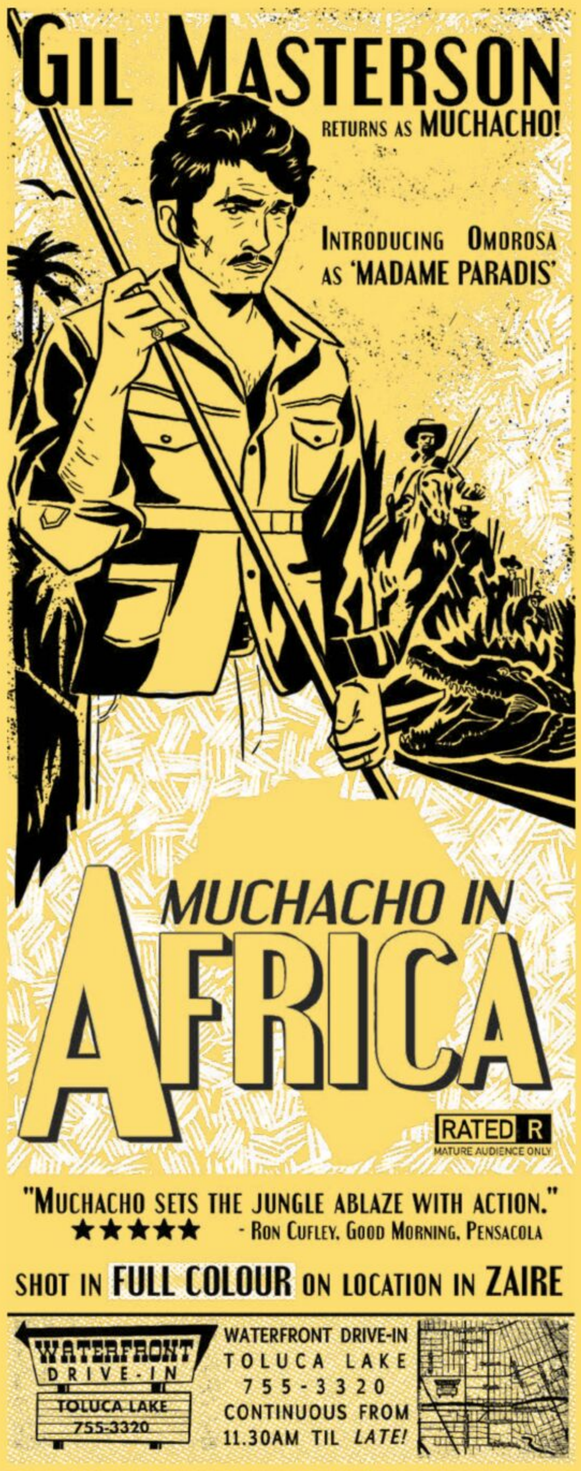

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THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF "SUSHI"

Report by food desk editor H. Morris Maillard

IT'S THE NEWEST CULINARY PHENOMENON SWEEPING LOS ANGELES. GET A TASTE OF... JAPAN!

For decades, the most sophisticated Angeleno palates have sought out exciting new delicacies in Mexican or Chinese food, and now the next frontier of taste is here. From Irvine to the Valley, Japanese cuisine has taken strip malls by storm, as curious diners feast on savory noodle soups and the crispy dumplings known as "gyoza". But the main event has to be "sushi", a rice dish in which raw seafood is the star of the show. (Don't lose your lunch – by using only the freshest cuts, the expert chefs ensure that no one's going to be green around the gills!) For the novice nosher, here's a guide to some key items customary to this thrilling tradition:

● - The standard order is for one of the house rolls, in which rice and sheets of black seaweed ("nori") encircle mouthwatering morsels of the ocean's bounty. Try the awith an indulgent thickened mayonnaise, or the tuna with a spicy sauce. Not to worry, this won't be anything like the canned stuff you had in grade school.

● "Nigiri" translates back to English as "two fingers," describing the method by which a chef forms a ball of rice in his palm before gently laying your fish or shellfish on top of it. Give the "ebi" a whirl and you'll never go back to boring old shrimp cocktail again!

● The tidy, compact "bento box" will change lunch-on-the-go as you know it. A roll of your choosing will be packaged with a small salad, a cup of perfectly salty miso-flavor soup, and other goodies. Why not give your baloney sandwich the week off?

● Though technically outside of the sushi family, sashimi is every bit as delicious. Sliced thin and served without rice, the eel ("unagi"), urchin ("uni"), and octopus ("tako") will whisk you away on a voyage to parts East.

● Your meal will be served with a bit of pickled ginger for that extra zing, along with a dipping soy sauce rich in the fabled "fifth flavor" of umami. And no, that's not guacamole – that green paste is called "wasabi", and it's got a little bit of a temper! *For intrepid gourmands only.*

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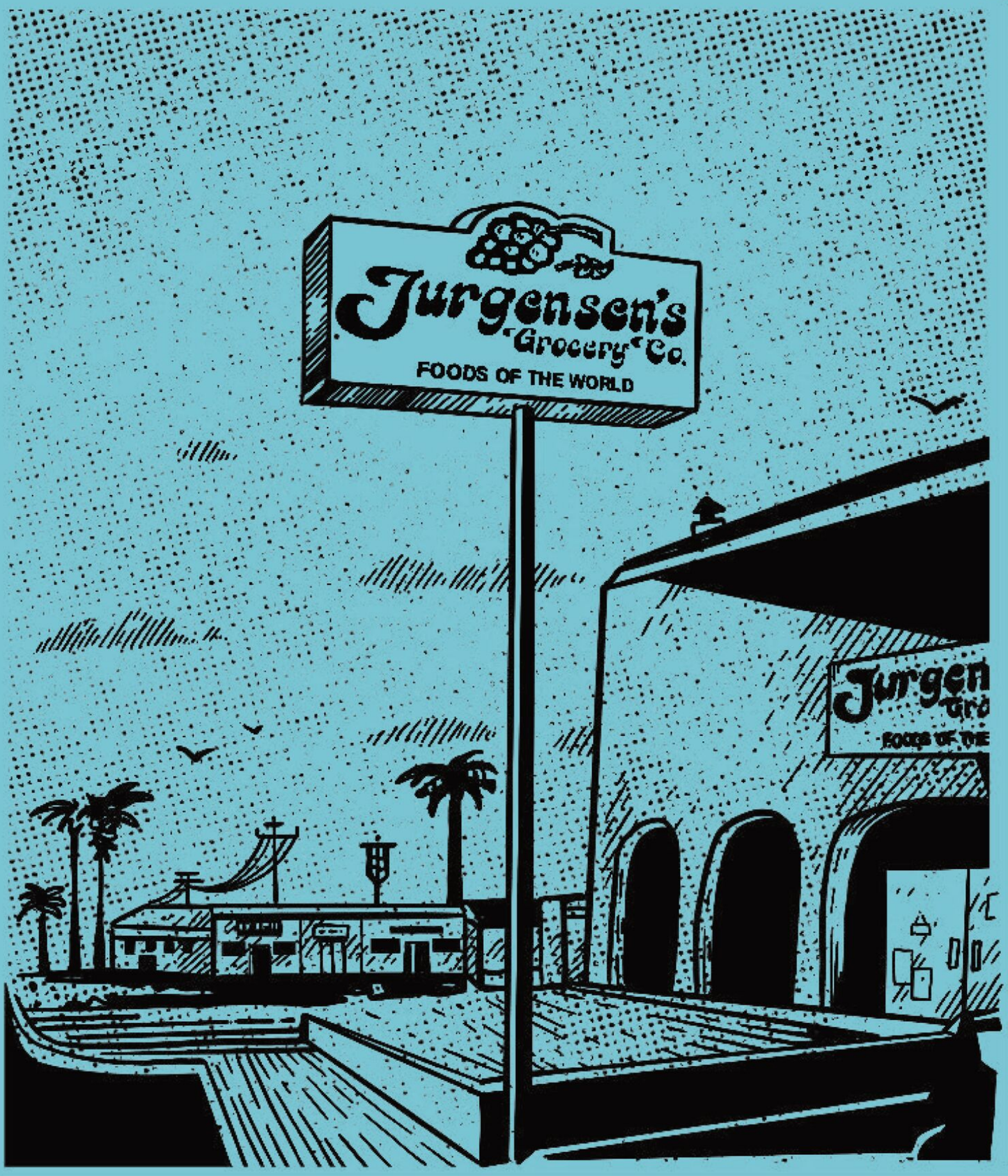

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ISSUE 92

The Licorice Pizza Issue

FEATURE CONTENTS

P.12-15

Review: Licorice Pizza

P.16-23

We Got This! An Interview with Paul Thomas Anderson and Alana Haim

Hannah Strong talks landscape, music and love with *Licorice Pizza*'s writer/director and its star.

P.24-25

Meet The World's Biggest PTA Fan

Flowers Foster heads to Seattle to meet an ecentric college kid with a bizarre and antisocial obsession.

P.26-28

Mark Bridges: Costumier to the Stars

The *Licorice Pizza* costume designer on the film's memorable look.

P.32-34

Oh, David, Give Me Your Hands.

An encounter with David Bowie in 1973, by Cady Chrysler.

P.35

Hot to Trot: Gary Valentine

A profile of the new actor and entrepreneur.

P.36-37

Letters: Bring Back Pinball!

A young man wants to strike down a nonsense law from the statues.

P.38-39

Horoscopes, by Laurel Canyon

P.40-41

Obituary: Baxter Conrad

The enigmatic icon is remembered by his opium dealer, Lemuel Cruz-Campo.

P.42-43

Threads #20: The White Suit

Christina Newland tackles this slick icon of silver screen machismo.

Grant
PHOTOGRAPHY
FAT BERNIE'S
PINBALL PALACE
FUN FOR ALL
EAT BERNIES
PINBALL
PALACE
TEST YOUR SKILLS
PIN BALL
ARCADE
Grant
PHOTOGRAPHY

Directed by **PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON**
Starring **ALANA HAIM, COOPER HOFFMAN, BRADLEY COOPER**
Released **1 JANUARY**

Licorice Pizza

A summertime dream of monkeyshines, romantic dalliances and the early history of the waterbed craze – this is Paul Thomas Anderson's most purely pleasureable and swooningly immersive film to date.

'Something/Anything' is the 1972 album by genre-hopping singer/songwriter Todd Rundgren, namechecked in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Licorice Pizza*. A commercial for the record emanates from a car radio as teen actor-cum-entrepreneur Gary Valentine (Cooper Hoffman) slumps into a pit of dejection upon spotting the girl of his dreams, Alana Kane (Alana Haim), hanging out at the burger stand with another guy. A little in the vein of 'The White Album' by The Beatles, 'Something/Anything' is a stellar mish-mash of tones and styles, and an example of an artist who is so fully entrenched and consumed by the world of pop songwriting, that it comes across as proof he could do anything. It's effortless genius. And it is, in its structure, a torrent of brilliant if scattershot ideas, but in the end, these ideas somehow coalesce into something complete and beautiful.

The same could be said of *Licorice Pizza*, in which Anderson exerts complete mastery over his medium, but in a way that is almost acrobatically louche and nimble. He exudes confidence in a manner that's never showy or grandstanding – which he perhaps did in earlier films such as *There Will be Blood* and *The Master*, where the sheer force of the filmmaking cracks you over the temple (in a good way). As with 'Something/Anything', *Licorice Pizza* plays out like a stacked double LP, with the first half delivering woozy summer jams – with a couple of 60-second punk blasts tossed in to raise the pulse – while the second is a more conceptual, tripartite affair as our heroes edge ever closer not to adulthood, but to the desire for responsibility and immersion into society, that means jobs, money, marriage. Everyone will have their own favourite cuts. And yes, there's arguably a dud or two on there as well – an idea that was maybe taken out of the oven before it was fully cooked. Yet it works as a singular edifice, a radiant snowglobe capturing a blissful moment of wayward youth and the story of two people whose lives intersect in increasingly eccentric and profound ways.

Licorice Pizza is, at its heart, a love story about two people who never seem to be in love at the same time. This conceit is a masterstroke, as it provides a catalyst for conflict and comedy right up until its charmingly throwaway will they/won't they

climax. Gary is 15 and is in line for his high school portrait, attempting to flatten his greasy side-parting. Alana says she's 25, but her actual age is never confirmed – considering how she interacts with her family and her surfeit of free time, it seems more likely she's in her late teens. In her position as mirror girl for the Tiny Toes photographic company, she meets cute with Gary and, from moment one, he comes on to her with the force of a horny steam train. Yet despite his tender years, he is a gentleman and conducts himself as such: out come the dinner invites, the veiled proposals of marriage and the painfully witty rejoinders. They are met by Alana with an abject horror that's cut through with a smidgeon of intrigue and lots of emphatic swearing. At various points she compares this strawberry blonde braggadocio to Robert Goulet, Dean Martin, Don Rickles, Einstein and David Cassidy, which from a screenwriting perspective, fairly well sums him up. Gary, meanwhile, unironically self-identifies as, "a showman", "a song and dance man." It's his "calling."

From there on in, the film charts their cosily platonic interactions across various get-rich-quick schemes, an oil embargo, a dangerous brush with the Hollywood B-list, a run-in with the cops, a far scarier run-in with film producer Jon Peters (Bradley Cooper, chef's kiss), drinks, dinners, agent pow-wows, and the greatest pinball parlour the world has ever seen. Gary's irrepressible moxy tends to be the thing that advances the individual episodes, but one moving aspect of the film when taken as a whole is the subtle ways in which the two protagonists rub off on and inspire one another. True to life, a lot of the things that happen here are forgotten about or discarded as our attention spans direct us down the unknown byways of life. Yet the experiences form lessons which live on inside, perhaps in a way that Anderson doesn't feel the need to reveal, but which provides the film with its rich emotional arc.

The other thing worth mentioning is that *Licorice Pizza* plays (and possibly beats) *Once Upon a Time in... Hollywood* at its own game in its romantic, full-bore depiction of mid-century Los Angeles. Harking back to *Boogie Nights* and *Inherent Vice*, this is Anderson's most satisfying and all-enveloping piece of world-building to date. Yet unlike Tarantino, Anderson doesn't

manipulate the landscape to reflect his own tastes and desires. There's no sense of preciousness here. Both filmmakers position themselves as visual cultural historians in a sense, but the difference is that Anderson is more smitten by objectivity and the possibility of discovery. As such, his film offers a more naturally immersive backdrop against which this blithe romance plays out. And like Tarantino, Anderson employs his privilege to manipulate historical fact to better serve the story. He just doesn't make a big deal about it – to him, all cinema is inherent fantasy.

Licorice Pizza is a slow-release product, something that creeps up on you, inveigles its way into your conscience. It's silky-smooth filmmaking perfection, bolstered by a full hand of remarkably charismatic star supporting turns from the likes of Sean Penn, Benny Safdie, Tom Waits, and film-stealer Harriet Sansom Harris as Gary's enigmatically intense agent. Its bald-faced simplicity is such that many a PTA fan (this writer included) might watch the film believing it to be a piece of hard experimentation that rejects convention and generic boundaries at every turn. And maybe it is by stealth? But, similar to such canonical hang-out films as George Lucas's *American Graffiti*, Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* and Amy Heckerling's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, it can also be taken and relished at face value – as a superfun, arm-flailing dash through life's rich pageant.

DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION

It's PTA fer chrissakes. The mad title has us even more hot under the collar. **5**

ENJOYMENT

If you could produce and bottle enjoyment as a chemical compound, it would taste a lot like Licorice Pizza. **5**

IN RETROSPECT

Like any LP worth its salt, this is one where you'll want to be dropping the needle on over and over again. **5**

WE GOT THIS!

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON AND ALANA HAIM IN CONVERSATION ON THE SUBJECT OF THE SWELL NEW MOTION PICTURE LICORICE PIZZA.

INTERVIEW BY HANNAH STRONG

PORTRAITS BY BETH FENTON

Chapter One: The Valley

Locals just call it 'The Valley' – the glamorous region nestled between the Los Angeles Basin and the Santa Susana Mountains. It's a place best known as the home of Walt Disney and Warner Brothers studios, and – more notoriously – has been the atom heart of the adult entertainment industry for some 30 years, until the advent of the internet ushered in its decline.

The San Fernando Valley is also the neighbourhood where Paul Thomas Anderson grew up, providing a rich source of inspiration throughout his career. Valley-set works include *Boogie Nights* from 1997 which charts the rise and fall of porn star Dirk Diggler (Mark Wahlberg), swiftly followed in 1999 by the epic ensemble fresco, *Magnolia*, and then after that in 2002 the offbeat romantic-comedy *Punch-Drunk Love*. After 2018's *Phantom Thread* led the director to foggy London town, he returned to the familiar warmth of California sun for his latest, *Licorice Pizza*, an effervescent story of boy meets girl set during the summer of 1973.

The Valley is also home to *Licorice Pizza*'s leading lady, Alana Haim, whose mother coincidentally taught the filmmaker art in elementary school. Better known as the youngest member of all-sister folk-rock trio HAIM, this is Alana's first professional acting role, and she announces herself as a cocky, magnetic screen presence playing directionless twentysomething Alana Kane, whose chance meeting with fast-talking teen entrepreneur Gary Valentine (Cooper Hoffman) marks the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Drawing on elements of arcane Hollywood history as well as anecdotes from his own friends and colleagues, Anderson's film is a wry, sun-drenched portrait of youth in revolt. The San Fernando Valley is as much a part of its DNA as the all-killer-no-filler soundtrack and the effortlessly charming performances from its stacked ensemble cast.

LWLies: What's the first place you'd recommend to someone spending a day in the San Fernando Valley?

Paul Thomas Anderson: If you were to consider the Valley starting in Burbank, Burbank has Warner Bros, and then right next door is Universal... So you're starting on these two epicentres of film production, then you take Ventura Boulevard, which is the main artery that runs through the San Fernando Valley. I would just start on Ventura and slowly cruise west. On the left-hand side you'll see the old Du-par's diner, which is now a fucking Sephora.

Alana Haim: So sad...

PTA: Just a little bit further down to the left, you'll see the Studio City Theatre built in 1940, which is now unfortunately a Barnes & Noble. Well, we like Barnes & Noble so we'll support that, but we wish it was still a movie theatre. Continuing west past the mini malls, you can stop at the Weddington golf course, for a quick little bit of that, or a little tennis. You can get to Coldwater, where the great Tail o' the Cock used to be.

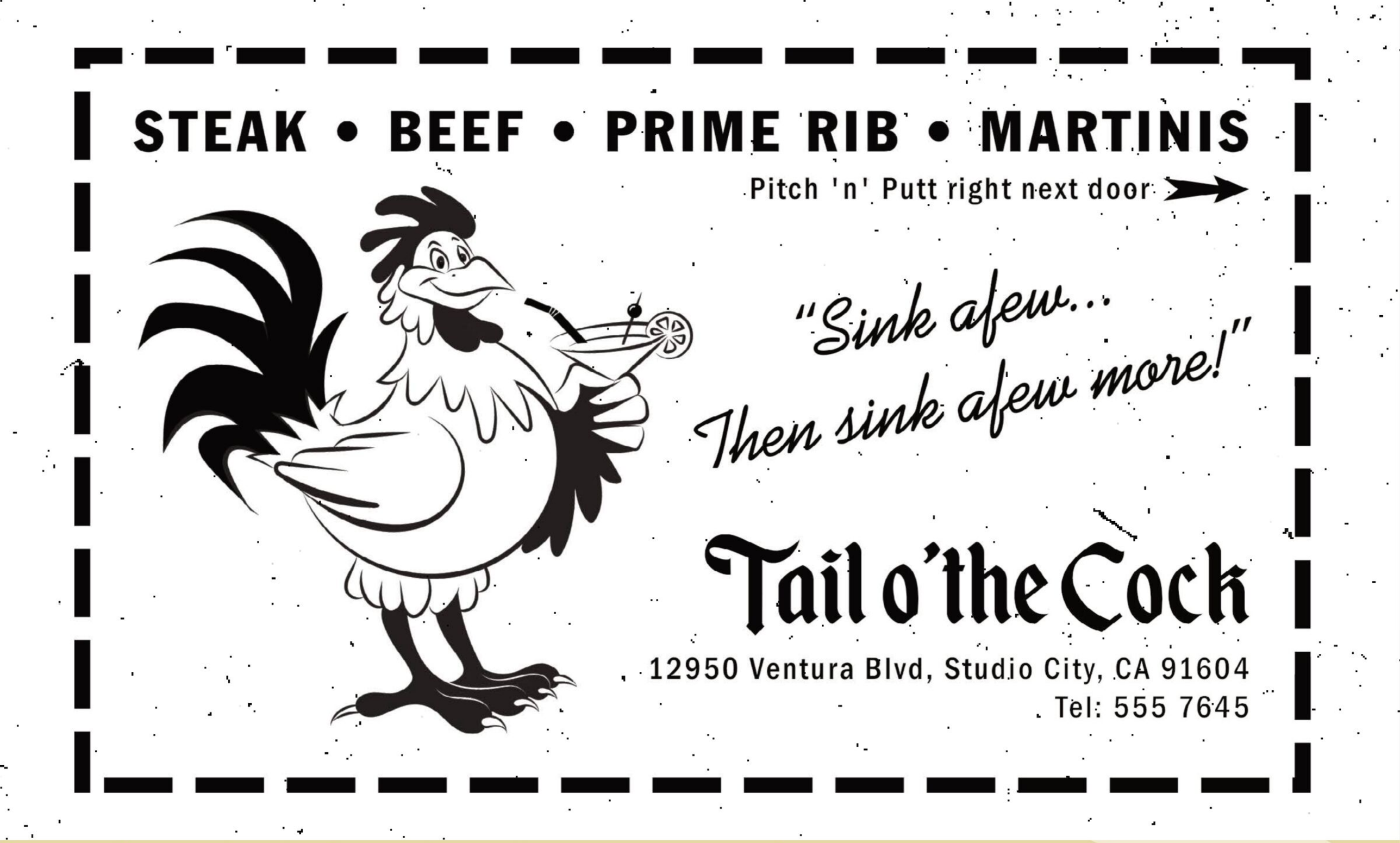
AH: Don't forget Art's!

PTA: Oh, Art's Deli, I'm sorry!

AH: We can go back, that's okay.

PTA: I don't wanna do the whole tour! You can get to the intersection of Van Nuys and Ventura and see the location where the three Haim sisters walk down the street in the 'Want You Back' video.

AH: That's true. I also worked in a shop on Ventura Boulevard.



PTA: Yeah? Oh fuck it, I don't know. You would see a mini mall that looks kinda gross and not that attractive, but within it is the most incredible sushi restaurant that you've ever been to in your entire life, run by a Japanese masterchef who's decided that the San Fernando Valley became third to Tokyo and Kyoto as this place where Japanese food is specialised. You would not know it, but you have to look for it. But I mean, fuck, it's just a suburb.

AH: Yeah, we try to glamourise it but it is just a suburb.

Do you feel like the San Fernando Valley that we see in *Licorice Pizza* has changed beyond recognition?

PTA: There's a horrible thing that happens every couple of months where you drive by a beautiful old ranch home, and the next day you go by and it usually has green fencing around it, and it means that it's going to be demolished and they're going to build these horrible three-storey cookie cutter houses. Like anything, less and less of the past remains. But if you squint, you can still see what it looked like back then.

You mentioned the 'Want You Back' video. One thing in *Licorice Pizza* is that there's a lot of walking and running.

AH: Two things that I'm apparently very good at.

Yeah, it's a continuation of a thread that started a long time ago, in both the HAIM promos and Paul's films. There's a lot of people walking around, which seems kind of antithetical to the geography of Los Angeles. Are you trying to subconsciously subvert that narrative, maybe reposition LA as a walking city?

PTA: That's a tall order. I do like it – I had an experience recently where a very hardcore New Yorker was coming over to my house and they posted up in a coffee shop about a mile away from where I live. They looked at their phone and thought, 'Well, I'll just walk from here to his house.' It was a classic New Yorker mistake. There was absolutely no way. Even though it may say it's only a mile, you're just not going to make it: it's 100 degree heat; it's up hill; it's windy roads – it's just not gonna work. So no, we're not trying to change the narrative, but there's a certain point through making a film, where having people driving around runs out of gas. It's more cinematic to have people running and walking. The reality is that there's more driving, but no one wants to see that.

AH: You know, it's really funny. That walking kind of came naturally to me.

PTA: I have my own answer about this, but I want to hear what you say first.

AH: I think walking with my siblings... we've heard it's really hard to make walking seem natural when you're on camera, and I never really knew that. In music videos we're walking to the beat and we have music playing. One of my favourite memories was when we were shooting the opening scene of the movie, where I'm walking and I'm in the Tiny Toes outfit, and Paul had played me Nina Simone's 'July Tree' right before I was going to walk, so I had the beat in my mind. He was like, 'You can do this!' Apparently that's very hard for some people, but not hard for me.

PTA: There's nothing to it except that when you're making a video and you have no money, what else is there to do? You need something to happen. You need some action. You have no time so it's cheap, quick and cinematic. Just fucking walk.

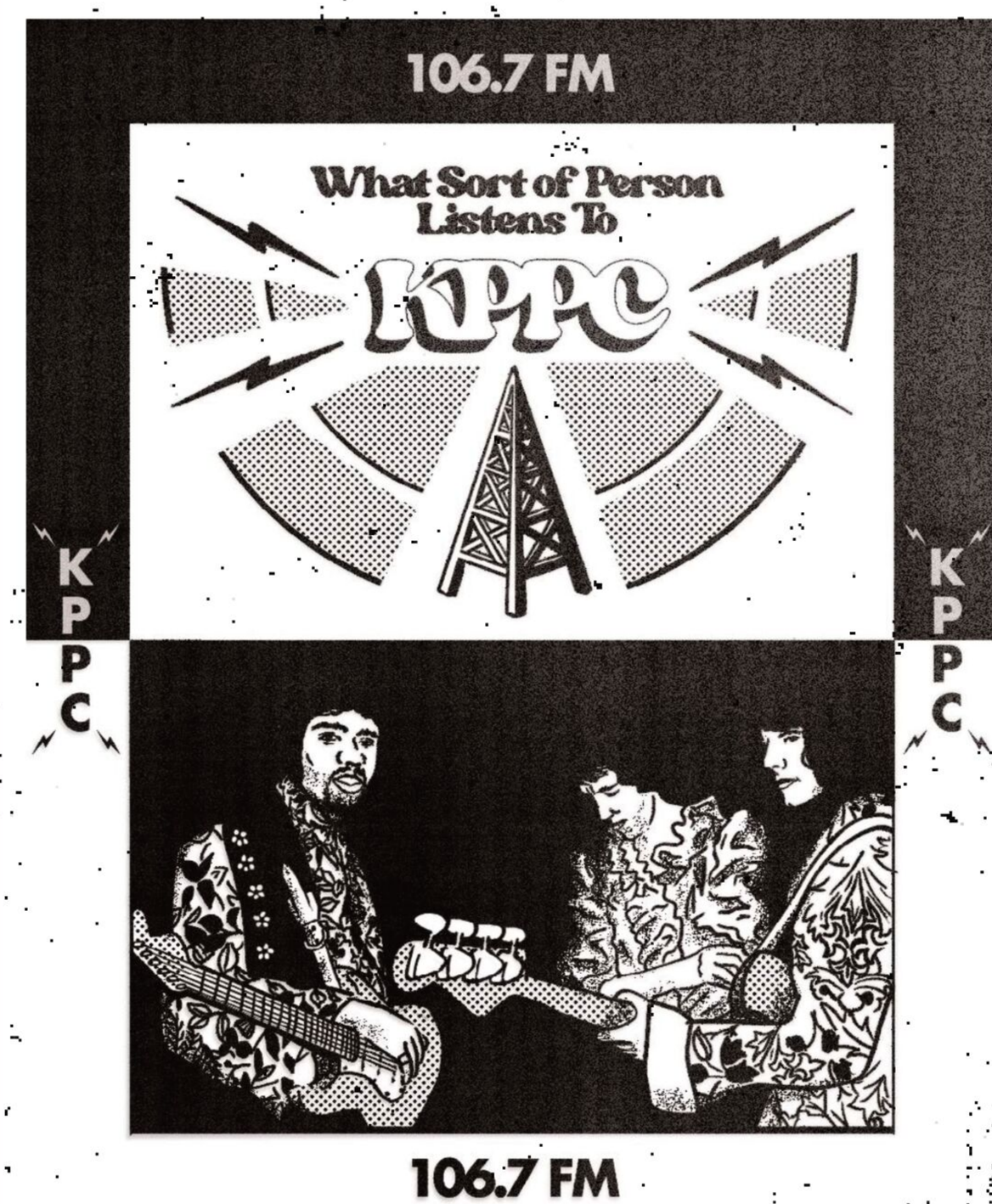
AH: I mean, damn. You're really peeking behind the HAIM curtain. But I will be walking in music videos till the day I die. I will say, though, walking and running in this film is very important 'cause it got me out of my head. When you're focusing on something like that, you don't think about what you're saying, you're exhausted and that was something that actually shocked me. Paul would always be like, 'Go run,' and I'd be like [sighs] 'Okay, I'm gonna run.' But the thing is, it's super important to how me and Cooper were able to do it, because it got us out of our heads in the best way.

There's a visual parallel between the end of *Licorice Pizza* and the airport scene in *Punch-Drunk Love*. Is there is a connective thread running between all your films set in the Valley?

PTA: There must be, but none of it is by design. I can't underline enough, not by design. There's no cinematic universe that I would be struggling to create, there just isn't. You end up repeating yourself accidentally sometimes, never on purpose. Or perhaps you do realise after you've written some things, 'Well, I have done that before, shall I try to do something else?' And you think, 'Yes, you should try to do something else,' and then you can't come up with anything else so you say, 'Well I'm not gonna do anything else, this is what I'm gonna do. Fuck it!'

It worked the first time!

PTA: But really, you're always serving this story, then the story at a certain point is taking care of itself. I can't stress enough that there's a lot of work that can go into the first half of a script generally. You're creating these characters, you're creating the scenario, you're putting the pieces together, you're trying to get it to flow, but there's a certain point – you hope – when it is moving down a hill and all the things that you've created are taking care of themselves. They're speaking back to you in the end.



Chapter Two: Sounds

From 'Jessie's Girl' in *Boogie Nights* to 'Get Thee Behind Me Satan' in *The Master*, Paul Thomas Anderson has always had a knack for choosing the right track for the right scene. Not only that, the partnership between Anderson and composer-musician Jonny Greenwood, which began with *There Will be Blood*, has yielded some of the finest contemporary film scores around. Given *Licorice Pizza*'s '70s setting, it's only appropriate that the soundtrack features the likes of Paul McCartney and Wings, The Doors, Donovan and David Bowie as well as a few new compositions from Greenwood.

HAIM's musical history is fitting too; prior to forming the popular girl group they are today, Alana and her sisters Danielle and Este were part of a band with their parents covering Van Morrison and Billy Joel songs at weddings and community events. Their distinctive sound owes much to the pop music of the '70s, notably Fleetwood Mac.

HAIM is very influenced by the music of the 1970s. Do you remember where that started for you and your sisters?

AH: Living in LA, you're always in your car and my parents only let us listen to this radio station called K-Earth 101 which they pretty much only played '70s music. Well, when I was younger it was the '50s, '60s, '70s – when I got a little older they started getting into the '80s and I think now they're up to the '90s. I heard NSYNC on K-Earth 101 which is shocking to me.

PTA: That's 30 years ago Alana. *Thirty* years ago.

AH: But we were always so obsessed! All the concerts I went to when I was younger... my first concert was The Eagles. Some people like 'em, some people don't like 'em. I love them. But I've always loved that era and it seeped into me and my sisters when we started making music for ourselves.

Is there a particular band that was the driving force which made you think this is something we want to explore musically?

AH: There's so many, not just in the '70s. I was in a cover band with my parents so that also helped. We did a lot of Santana, we did a lot of Van Morrison, Beatles, Rolling Stones. Billy Joel made its way in there too. I mean, I love Jackson Browne, I love Joni, Freda Payne... It's just what I grew up with.

PTA: When you say '70s music, there's an assumption that this is some wild niche. We all collectively, in the whole fucking world, are looking back and going, 'Oh my God, look at this jackpot and this incredibly fertile time, this music that's lasted for so long that wasn't just good then but is good now.' Anywhere in the world right now you put on one of these songs that you're talking about and everybody knows it and everybody likes it. It's not even your style or taste at a certain point, it's like no, no, no, the whole world is down with–

AH: Joni.

PTA: Joni. It's not like, 'How did you get into Squarepusher?' It's so worldly. It's amazing how long... well, it's not amazing how long this music has lasted. Like, it's fucking obvious.

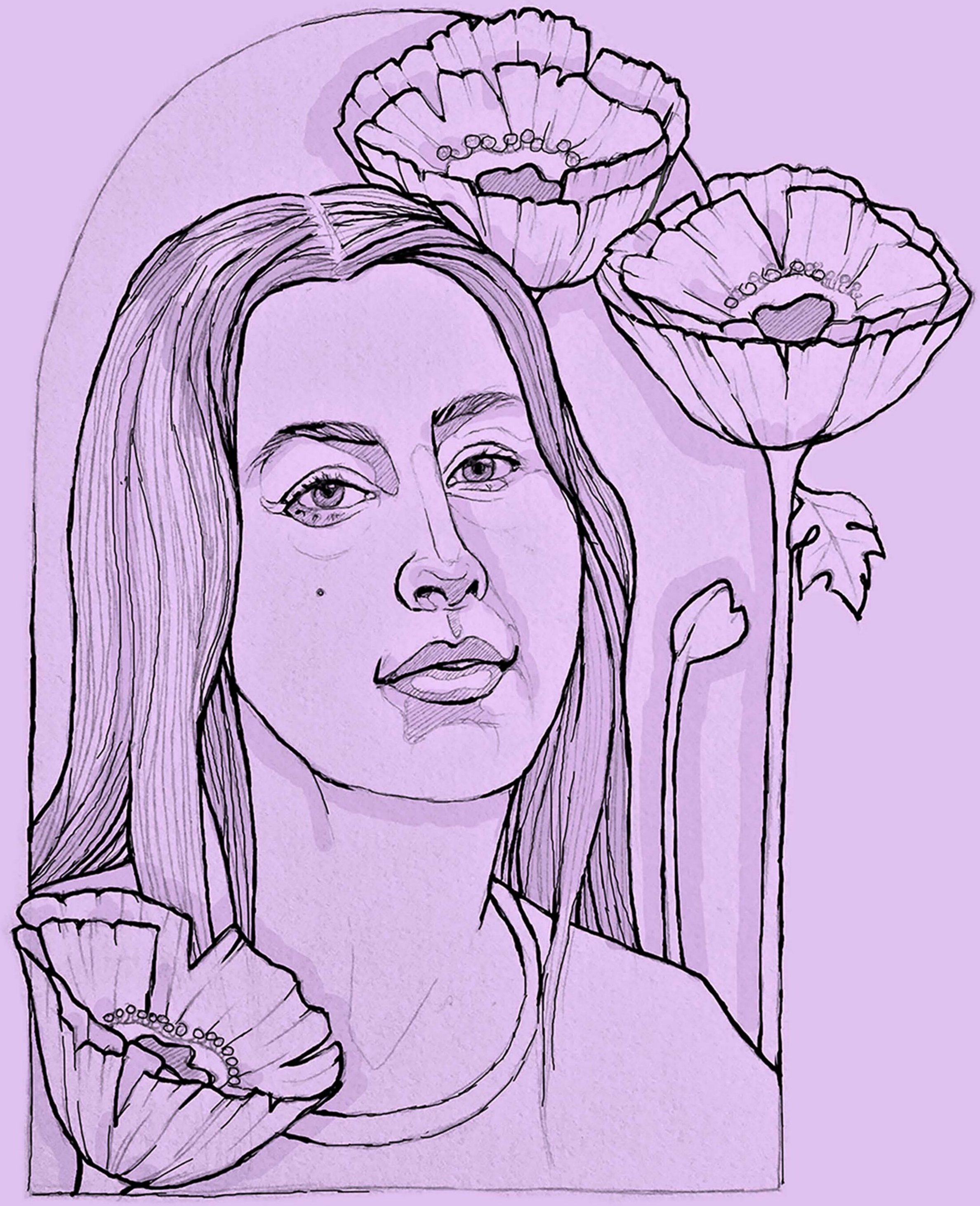
AH: It's just fucking good!

Alana Haim: "My first concert was The Eagles. Some people like 'em and some people don't like 'em. I love them."

Do you listen to music when you're writing your scripts? I was really interested by how much pop music is in this film compared to your last few which were more heavily scored.

PTA: Yeah, it had been a minute since I had a story that would work with that use of music, the last few stories were dependent upon Jonny Greenwood and what he would bring to it. It seemed pretty clear that the best way to tell this story was to utilise songs of the period, songs that Alana and Gary would be listening to. Songs that would be on the radio. To not be afraid of digging even further back, using Nina Simone or using the Bing Crosby and Andrews Sisters' version of 'Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive' because that stuff would still be lingering on the radio. Believe it or not, a lot of radio broadcasts that I found from that time, depending on the station, weren't shy about playing songs that were 20 years old – the K-Earth 101 of the day. So you didn't have to just feel an obligation to play what was on the radio in 1972, you could be a little bit looser.

You just have to ask yourself, 'Is it okay to use David Bowie?', 'Is it okay to use Paul McCartney?' Because I've seen films that are willing to pay for that song but don't deserve it because they're cheating. They haven't done the work with the characters and everything else that has to be there, to earn the



privilege of having a Paul McCartney song or a David Bowie. I egotistically do feel like we worked really hard and I felt like we were worthy enough to use those songs and you benefit from it, obviously. We benefit from putting ourselves in collaboration with those artists, and pretending can get you up to a point, 'cause it helps an audience to feel something. But an audience will turn on you if you turn that up as a way to fill the void, if you haven't engaged them with your characters.

Increasingly it feels like songs have been put in films because they got the licensing rights, but it doesn't serve a purpose.

PTA: I just remembered there was an Onion headline I saw the other day, something like, "Young screenwriter plays 'Cherry Bomb' as substitute for female character development". That's funny!

That's exactly it!

PTA: I'll play 'Cherry Bomb' – that way I won't have to fucking figure out anything else about her character.

I was really thrilled to see Tom Waits in the film.

AH: A dream. He is a dream. He is incredible and really came in with the best spirit and we needed it at that point 'cause we were a couple of months into the shooting and he's just such a presence. He's fucking Tom Waits. I mean, he walks into a room you're like, 'Fuck, that's Tom Waits!' He's the coolest dude on the planet and he's so talented and, on top of everything, he's an incredible actor.

PTA: He's a presence but he isn't. What I mean by that is, for being a living legend, he's not sucking the air out of the room, or making you *feel* that you're around a living legend. He's a very practical and pragmatic person who just happens to be Tom Waits and he's there to do a job. The amazing thing about him is, pretty quickly, you're in the business of working with him and he's in the business of trying to do a good job as an actor, all the while being so incredibly cool.

AH: Yeah, the coolest.

PTA: You are just holding on for dear life. Trying to not disappoint him. He's such a collaborator, so terrific to work with, and it's a double as well. It's not just Tom Waits, you've got Sean Penn *and* Tom Waits. There was a moment where I saw the two of them and I thought, 'This is Christmas for me!' I've got the two of them in a scene, together, with Alana in the centre of it looking baffled, three martinis in.

AH: That's really me holding on for dear life, like, 'How did I get here?'

Chapter Three: Love

You're likely to hear people refer to *Licorice Pizza* as a love story – not just concerning the relationship between Gary Valentine and Alana Kane, but in a more ethereal sense: love of your hometown; love of movies; love of being young, directionless and unfailingly alive. While there's often a creeping darkness within the meticulous worlds Anderson forges, there's a sunny optimism to his latest work, and this warmth extends to the way he incorporates elements of Hollywood's star-flecked history.

Sean Penn's character inspired by William Holden, and you have Bradley Cooper Hollywood producer Jon Peters. Benny Safdie as LA City Councilman Joel Wachs. Gary is inspired by a friend of yours, Gary Goetzman, who is also film and TV. How do you approach fictionalising real people in a way that's respectful, but also gives you creative freedom?

PTA: You move a goalpost around a lot is how you do it. William Holden's one of my favourite actors, and I didn't want to ask Sean to do an impression of William Holden. So it can be an Easter egg, or you can see the parallel and that's fine, but he doesn't have to fill those shoes or do that. Most of the time, whether it's a story, a real life person, a character from a book – shit – an animal, you can point an actor in a direction towards something to use in their portrayal. Gary Goetzman went to the Ed Sullivan show to perform with Lucille Ball, but I didn't think doing a Lucille Ball impression would be the right thing to ask of an actress, so you just steal all the best bits. It's an instinctual decision, I suppose.

Outside of the Valley many people don't know Joel Wachs, but he really was a city councilman who worked for almost 30 years. The decision to use his actual name is if anybody took two seconds to look around and discover something about his life, I think they'd find it incredibly inspiring and fulfilling because he was a wonderful guy. Back to a question that you asked earlier, if you had been in the San Fernando Valley, particularly Studio City or Sherman Oaks up until the '90s, it looked very much the same. A lot of the reasons why is because of Joel Wachs. He was very strong about development, disallowing development to change it. The second he wasn't the city councilman, things did change for the worse, so I always admired him for that.

What did Jon say when you told him Bradley Cooper would play him given their past disagreement over *A Star is Born*?

PTA: He thought it was terrific casting. Maybe he wished it had been Brad Pitt but he was okay with Bradley Cooper [laughs]. I think he was very excited. He's a good-natured guy at this point, in my experience with him. It was not even

remotely close to this wild man producer. He was a big softie.

There's a moment we see in the trailer where Jon's smashing some car windows which isn't in the actual film. How long was the first cut?

PTA: Not too much longer. That was a very quick moment after Gary and Alana drive off from the gas station that we went back to Jon Peters, so that scene that you see, it was only really about 15 to 20 seconds. The reason we didn't leave it in the film is because it would've been the only moment that you weren't with Gary or Alana. That's changing the point of view of the film... for a good laugh, maybe? But not really worth it in the end. But it's the kind of thing that can go well in the trailer. You get the energy of it and the feeling of it but in the body of the film it doesn't shift to another point of view which I think is important to keep. We didn't have that many scenes that we cut out. It was probably only about three or four, so maybe the longest the film ever was two-and-a-half hours. Maybe we cut about 15 minutes out of it. The hardest thing was cutting down the Tail o' the Cock sequence to a manageable size. There was more stuff in there.

***Phantom Thread* is about the same length as this. Are your films getting shorter intentionally?**

PTA: You're implying that my films before were bloated, oversized...

AH: How dare you!

Of course not! I guess all films are about two-and-a-half hours nowadays, right?

PTA: Marvel movies are two hours and 45 minutes now. It's crazy. When I was a kid, action films, adventure films were never longer than 100 minutes. I suppose as I do this more it's constantly asking the question, 'What can we get rid of?' Shorter is better. I don't remember thinking that as much when I was a kid making movies. I wasn't asking myself that question but it's become a preoccupation now, I think for the better. Until somebody says, 'You might want to leave that best part of the movie in, you know. I know you don't need it but...' That can happen too. You can get a little scissor happy.

As someone who works on film and is committed to the cinematic experience, do you ever feel pressure to modernise?

PTA: I'm probably at the place where they think, 'He doesn't know how to do anything else, don't bother him'. I was at the dentist the other day and the woman was about to clean my teeth and she was like, 'Have you seen that new Michael Keaton

movie?' and she meant *Dopesick*. I said, 'But it's not a movie, it's a limited series', and she said, 'Yeah whatever, it's a movie'. It made me feel like a dinosaur. I make these films and they come out and they go in the theatres, but people are consuming things differently. They don't really see it the way that I see it anymore. So, is your question: do I feel old? Fucking yeah, a little bit.

Alana, HAIM have such a distinctive sound. Have you ever experienced pressure to change the way you do things in line with what's popular?

AH: You know, me and my siblings are very lucky that we're very intimidating. It's really hard to go against three people. We usually win. We've always been very adamant about doing whatever we feel and I feel like you can kind of see that in our records. No two sound the same. They're always evolving, always wanting to switch it up. But it's always on our terms. It's never someone telling us, 'Maybe you should try something else'.

PTA: If somebody said that they don't get a vote.

AH: Yeah, we've got this! That's how we've always been and it will never change, we're way too crazy about it

Is this the WORLD'S BIGGEST Paul Thomas Anderson fan?

On the scene with Flowers Foster

With the release of his new film *Licorice Pizza*, celebrated American auteur Paul Thomas Anderson is back once more as the name on everybody's lips. You love him, we love him, even your parents love him. But do you love him to the level that you would describe yourself as his all-time biggest fan? Under the grey skies of Seattle, WA we meet Quebec Farnsworth, a sophomore at University of Washington where he's the president of Delta AV and Cinematograph Society and the self-proclaimed Biggest Paul Thomas Anderson Fan in the Whole World. We enter his dorm room where he shows us his most prized possession: a bespoke selection of PTA-themed Craft Beers which he has hand-brewed, named and designed.

LWLies: Quebec, thank you for opening your doors to us.

Farnsworth: Yeah, sure. I'm just glad to get a chance to talk about my man Paul. Do you think he'll read this?

I'm sure of it. Let's start with how you first became aware of his work.

That's a great story. I must've been, like, in elementary school. I could hear my parents watching something in the living room so I snuck in. And on the screen was a woman I later discovered to be Julianne Moore. I had no idea what it was but I knew I wanted to see more. The film was, of course, *Boogie Nights*. The next day I snatched the tape and hid it in my room so I could watch it myself. My dad was so mad because he had to return it to Blockbuster and pay a fine [laughs for three minutes]. Then I just started following his work in high school, reading up on him and became really into his films. He's not like other guys out there, you know? I mean, he dropped out of film school 'cause his professor didn't like *Terminator*, that's so cool. To me he is the People's Director. He really is one of us.

How wonderful! Now, I have to mention the spread you prepared for us today. For our readers at home, Quebec has about 20 bottles of beer on his desk, all adorned with characters from PTA's films. Tell us how you came to make beer inspired by PTA?

Well, I started making my own craft beer at home when I was 17. My dad's a big beer guy so I thought it'd be a nice surprise. Then I started college and joined the film club. No one wanted to be in charge of it so I took over. I decided to do a retrospective of PTA's work but couldn't come up with any fun ideas to promote it. Then I went home for Christmas, saw the old crafting gear in the garage and it dawned upon me: PTA Craft Beer. It wasn't easy to sneak the stuff into the dorm, but I succeeded by smuggling it through the window in some tubs I stole from a palliative care hospital. My previous roommate threatened to report me for it but, then, for no reason, he just left.

He didn't understand your passion.

Exactly. Each beer is different so it takes a lot of time. So here, we have 'The Doc', named after Doc Sportello from *Inherent Vice*, my first one. 'Doc' is a vegan beer, because Joaquin is vegan, so it's a nice touch.

You mean Joaquin Phoenix?

Yeah. It has more earthy flavors and is infused with marijuana.

How do you infuse it?

Oh, um, I take a big hit and then blow the smoke into the bottle before I close it up.

Interesting. What else have you got there?

So many, this is only half of it. I got 'Fucking Chic' and 'Never Cursed' from *Phantom Thread*, 'Rollergirl' from *Boogie Nights*, 'Split Saber' from *The Master*. And here, this is my favourite, 'The Sandman', with actual sand in it. Most of them are named after characters or stuff from the films but Sandman is special so he gets a beer of his own. It's peanut butter flavoured. Right now I'm working on one named after Philip Seymour Hoffman but it's taking longer than I thought. It's gotta be a special one. I'm thinking of naming it 'Shut up! Shut the fuck up!' It's going to be a stout.

That's really wonderful. What else are you doing in your film club? Any other directors you're interested in?

We're doing our third retrospective on PTA. I do one every quarter. Some people aren't supportive. Like, they don't understand that new people come to school all the time so we have new audiences coming through. Some girls in the club call me sexist because of it but I don't care. How can it be sexist when so many of his films are about women, right? I think it's more sexist to show women directors' films just because they're women.

Right. Speaking of women, is there anyone special in your life that shares your passion?

Haha yeah, I have a girlfriend. Last month was her birthday so I planned a special surprise for her.

Do tell!

I sold my old car and got a Pontiac, like the one they drive in *Licorice Pizza*, because I saw it in the trailer. Then I drove us all the way down to LA to see a 70mm screening of *Phantom Thread* at the New Beverly. The round trip took like two days so we didn't have time to look around LA or really do anything apart from watch the movie, but it was really special.

She must've loved it.

Yeah. She said it wasn't what she expected so it was a good surprise. We haven't talked since. But it's midterms so she is probably just really busy. I'm hoping we can take another trip for my birthday. They're showing *Hard Eight* in Tucson. Mindy baby, call me, please.

LEAD FILM CRITIC

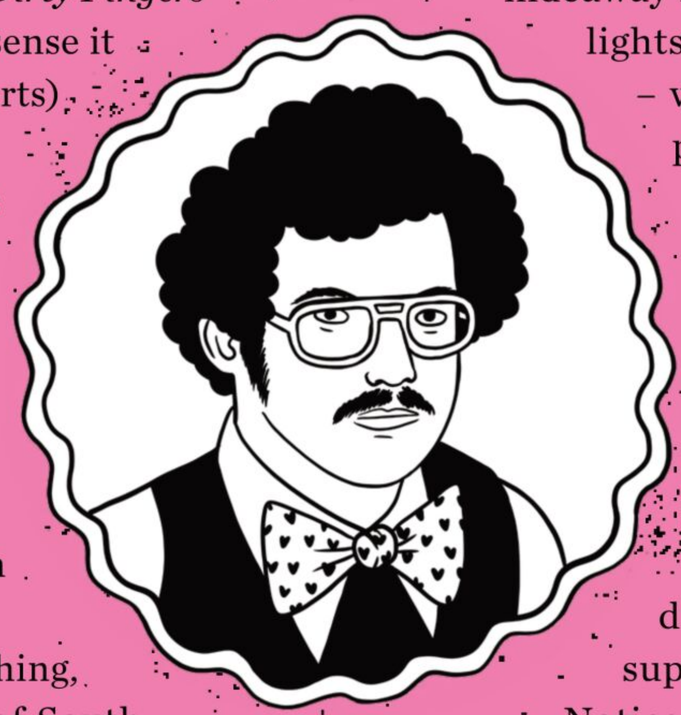
Jacques Gites

BEING ME IN '73

It's a wrap for the year in movies, and our resident critic separates the celluloid wheat from the chaff.

This year, I've once again been fending off would-be movie moguls and second-rate scribblers who consider my personal friendships with Hollywood's great and good as an open door to this business we call show. But one pitch that's been easy to bat away was from my old pal Blanco Sandero. You'll know Blanc as producer of full-bore subcultural art movies, including biker romp *Angels With Dirty Fingers* and last year's overnight sensation (in the sense it was mostly seen at 2am by junkies and perverts) *The Doctor is In... SANE!*

This pitch wasn't nearly so tasteful: my old chum is getting into the grape business. Yes, you heard right, he's hanging up his director's chair to make wine – in California! Needless to say, I declined his invitation to invest *mucho dinero* – the Sunshine State does one thing well, and it comes in cans not bottles. Film cans, I'm talking about.



Anyway, if decent Euro glug isn't your thing, you could do worse than a glass or two of South African vino (if you can get it past the thought police). There's a lot of hot air talked about SA, mostly by people who've never visited that stunning country, but when I dropped in on the set of *Gold* earlier this year (see April's issue of *Monthly Film Magazine*) I found a few decent chardonnays and a contented people watched over by second-to-none security forces. I suggest you catch Roger Moore and friends in that thrilling movie next summer for the kind of balanced view of South Africa you won't get from the Trots who run the *Observer* colour supplement.

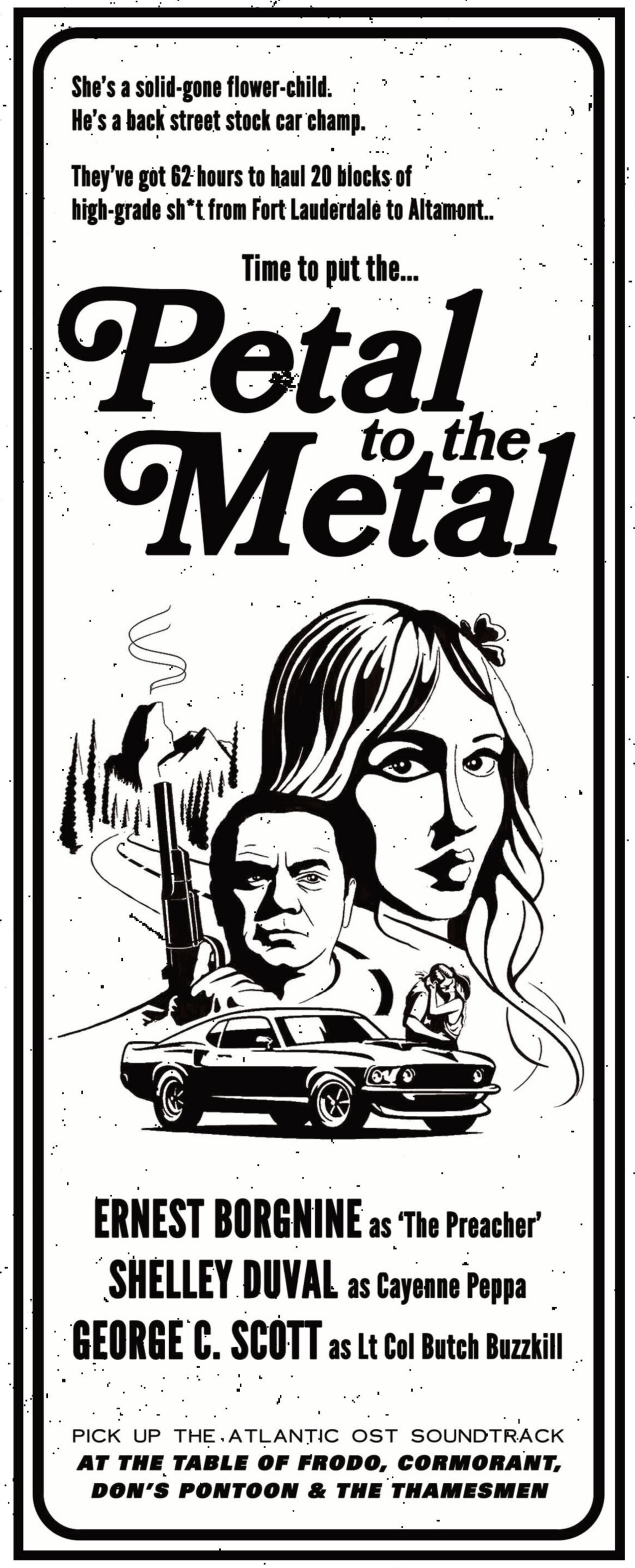
Speaking of which, I've gladly been a stranger to Britain's drizzle-soaked picket lines recently, having snapped up my late, much-indebted chum Baxter Conrad's Laurel Canyon hideaway for a song. Silver linings, eh? I hear the lights are out three days a week in London – well, the only candles I need in LA are patchouli-scented and used solely to enmooden my hot tub on games nights.

Here in Hollywood I've had a front-row seat at some of the movies set to shape cinema in the 1970s. There's Woody Allen's far-fetched *Sleeper* and the zany *Westworld*, in which some robots take over the Wild West. There's also the merciless dissection of poor town planning and supply-chain ineptitude, *Soylent Green*. Noticeably, there's been a dearth of sunny optimism in this year's crop of celluloid – could it be that the unrealised dreams of the 1960s have turned sour and, in their wreckage, a new era of dark, paranoid, amoral visions of society speak profoundly to our disillusion and uncertainty? Not likely, I'd say, but your local night school "cultural studies" department will be all over that idea like a particularly nasty rash.

In my view, there's plenty to smile about. It's been a fine year for European collabs, for example, with Henry Fonda popping up in the exciting French-Italian-West German spy picture *Night Flight from Moscow*, and Alec Guinness giving boffo Führer in Brit-Italian production *Hitler: The Last Ten Days*. And we have at last some recognition for the major talent of Corrado Farina, whose *Baba Yaga*, while ostensibly a tawdry display of delinquent eroticism, yields (on the fifth or sixth private screening) a richly insightful satire on the commodification of human physicality to rival Pasolini at his most barely palatable. More please!

And it seems some filmmakers at least are willing to make a moral statement, with *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Godspell* and *Magnum Force* all offering robust takes on societal ills and how we can tackle them. Messianic figures blind to moral nuance are nothing new, but Harry Callahan pursues his war on sin with mighty charisma and with such great quips, it's hard to be cross about his two-movie catalogue of extra-judicial murder.

Religion is big down in the Canyon, and right across LA right now. In fact, it was my neighbourhood priest Bob Harkness, better known to his flock as Grand Lord Indigo of The Pit, who put me on to *The Wicker Man*. He tells me the low-key Brit flick about country folk traditions is a wonderful introduction to his faith – and it certainly has verve and atmosphere, not to mention plenty of laughs at the expense of a priggish policeman character who has no idea of the scrapes he's getting into.



And "scrapes" are exactly what I expect as I look forward to meeting my colleagues at 1973's National Critics' Pantheon being held here in the City of Angels. I don't mind professional jealousy – if your Rolodex is fat with great names who also happen to be good friends, you expect it. But when Pauline and Roger jet in from their respective crime-ridden hellholes, we'll no doubt lock horns over my pal Clint ("A tall, cold cod", Pauline? I'll arrange lunch...) or Roger confusing a couple of good-looking teenagers wandering through fields with actual cinema (a film called *Badlands*, if you want to avoid it). It seems to me that, these days, some critics are more interested in showing off than they are in explaining which movies are great to people who otherwise wouldn't understand what they should be thinking. A recent case in point is a film called *The Holy Mountain*, so much-hailed that I flew coach to NYC to catch its premiere at the Waverley. What a ruddy waste of time! I couldn't make head nor tail of it, but if your LSD pusher is out of town and you're "jonesing," I suppose it might make a good substitute.

As for me, a Moscow Mule and 40 Gauloises will do just fine. And I'll be on my best behaviour come New Year's Eve, which I'll be spending with my local clergyman Bob. Inspired by *The Wicker Man*, he is planning an outdoor religious service in the Mojave desert to see in 1974, and has kindly invited yours truly along – watch this space for my report on our hi-jinx!

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COCKTAILS WITH MARK BRIDGES: COSTUMIER TO THE STARS

FLETCH BAGLEY TOOK IN A ROUND OF DAIQUIRIS ON THE TERRACE OF CHADNEY'S WITH THE LICORICE PIZZA COSTUME DESIGNER AND INDUSTRY LEGEND MARK BRIDGES, WHO REVEALS EXACTLY HOW HE CAME UP WITH ALL THOSE DIVINE GARMENTS.

First we asked Mark about his role as costume designer, and the first practical thing he does once signed off to work on a project. Here's what he had to say:

Two things. I just try and look at as many images from the period of the film as possible. And also, for this film, it was sucking in everything to do with the era. Then I go out, because in LA we're really lucky to have lots of rental houses for clothing. It's an industry town and we need it – people have been collecting it for years. I go and I try to put my hands on real garments. I think of character in terms of the garment. This shirt feels right for Alana's father, or this is a great Gary shirt. One of the things about working with Paul for 27 years is that I'm usually let in on what he's working on and I get to see early drafts of the scripts, so I can meander and start to think about things and look at movies. He'll send me funny texts. Like with this one he sent me, 'Everything you need to know about the hair is on The Brady Bunch.' Things like that...

We then asked Mr Bridges if it's a tougher job for him, being brought into the fold early on, before actors have been cast?

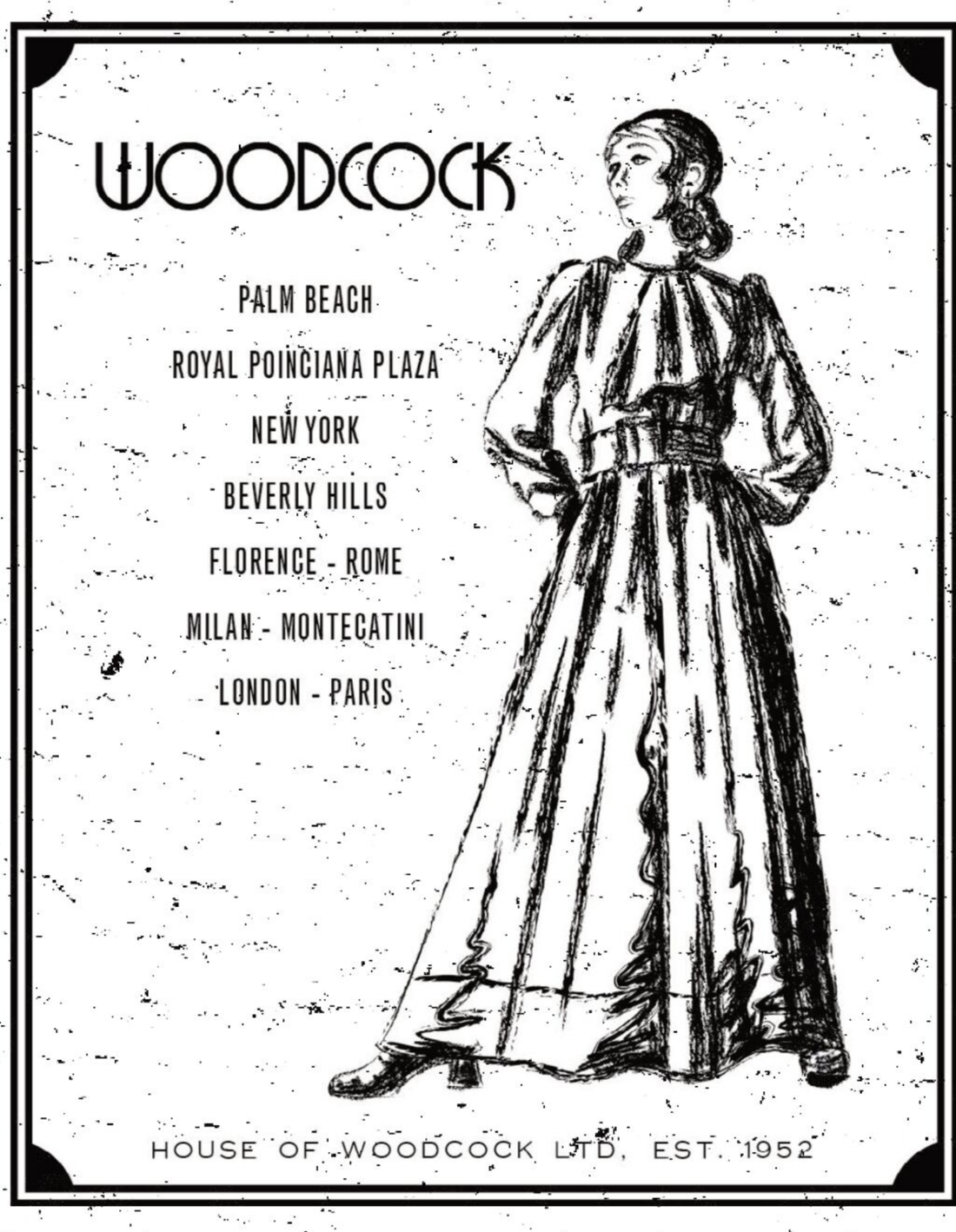
It is, but I do still think about who this person could be. Almost like thinking about a direction to take the actors in. It's like you know how you wanna design it, so you're at the point of, 'Just gimme the actors and I'll dress 'em.' Then Paul and I have specifics along the way because he cast a certain person and we had an image of how we might do it. It varies from film to film, and I think our process has evolved over the last nine films. It's a technological thing. I never used to get texts. When we were doing *Hard Eight* or *Boogie Nights* he had to talk to me in person. He was giving me Polaroids. There aren't any sketches for this particular film because we worked very organically, trying on shapes.

Honing in on *Licorice Pizza*, we then asked about the first fittings. What happened, when and with whom?

I had some fittings with Alana very early on because Paul wanted to do some camera tests to see how different film stocks and lenses looked. But he also wanted to work on the chemistry between Gary and Alana. I remember really early on, going up to her apartment and trying loads of stuff on her, doing three changes for a camera test, and that's when we first got to know each other. For the first fitting I had that red dress with the Peter Pan collar that she wears to the audition.

We wryly comment that this garment boasts nipple-like embellishments on the lapels. To which Mr Bridges responded:

It's funny, that was divine intervention. The design of the dress was like that. There are things like that which you can't put your finger on, but the garment seems right for the scene – and you just go with that. Later on, we can analyse why it works. A lot of times I'm just working on gut instinct, and I think Paul does too, actually.



We move the conversation on to his work with Paul, and whether he has specific ideas for costumes he wants that Mr Bridges will somehow have to acquire.

It's back and forth. Usually when he sends me something like that we have to make it. There's a t-shirt that Alana wears, you don't really get to see it. It's a scene where she's talking to her sister. He sent me an image of the t-shirt saying, 'We need this t-shirt on Alana.' And it says 'I'll Try Anything Once'. In the end we just made it. When I sent him a picture of it, he said, 'Oh my god, did we make that or is that the real one?' I said, 'We made it!' So I knew I was successful with that. He also wanted a t-shirt for Alana, something with words on it, but clearance and legal issues being what they are, we're always up to our ears in, 'Can we use this artwork? How much do we need to change it? Is some bogeyman going to sue us?' Having grown up in that period, I remember the cigarette ads with You've Come Along Way, Baby. That's perfectly timely, and right for Alana. So we went through clearance and they signed off on the type, and that phrase wasn't trademarked, and then we had to get it to the silk-screener. And I didn't want it to be too big as you'd be reading instead of looking at Alana's face. You always have to be careful about words on a shirt in a film. So we're all done. I put it on her. We do the scene. And then I get a text from Paul saying, 'That shirt was genius because you couldn't read it!' Then he decided to use it for the poster, which felt very satisfying. Out of necessity, a worded t-shirt that he wanted evolved into an image that he felt so strongly about that he used it to publicise the film. I guess that's why we've done nine films together, right?

Finally we ask to talk about Bradley Cooper's wonderful, billowy costume in this film. It's a delectable ensemble. How did it all come together?

It's real simple. First thing, we look at a bunch of images of Jon Peters. Then I gather things that could duplicate some looks in there. There was one of Jon I really loved where he had these great jeans and this patterned '70s shirt and a plaid sport coat. It was movie night for him and Barbra. I tried that. Then there's also one of Jon with Barbra and it's pretty much what we put Bradley in. Then it comes down to finding the garment. My assistant costume designer, Kimberly Adams-Galligan, went to one of the houses and got a tonne of options. We had 13 different shirts that might fall into that category. And then pants, a few different shapes. Boots I got – I thought boots would make him feel a little more cocky. And then we actually used a belt for the necklace you see him in. We got this look and everybody kinda loved it.

Then there comes the practical side. We had to make triples of that costume. And I didn't tell Paul, as he likes to go with one and have it real. For the sake of Paul, they're on Ventura Boulevard, it's the middle of the night, and if something happens to the one vintage shirt – I can't have that. I took it to my vintage shirt maker Anto of Beverly Hills and they replicated it for me in triplicate. I think it was a shirt that originated in the Philippines, and we had to make three pairs of the trousers too. A lot was going to happen in a white outfit. On the last day of Bradley shooting, Paul was like, 'Maybe this shirt should be ripped, we should put some blood on it?' and I said, 'Yep, go ahead!' because I knew I had copies in my back pocket. Having worked with Paul for so long, you want to give him the latitude to be inventive. You don't want him stressing out about the fact that it's the only shirt. My job is to make sure he can do whatever he wants

AND FROM THERE, MARK BRIDGES SUPPED THE LAST OF HIS DRINK, SHOT US A WINK THEN WENT ABOUT HIS DAY.

OH, DAVID, GIVE ME YOUR HANDS

AN ENCOUNTER WITH DAVID BOWIE IN 1973, BY CADY CHRYSLER

"Oh, David, give me your hands." That's what I whisper, in my mind, as I set down his Campari and soda. It's freaky cold in LA, for March, the pink trumpet blossom still nipped in the Valley. He's touring as this new character, Aladdin Sane, a burnt Ziggy Stardust who'll trash Ziggy's band one day, maddened by the violence he'd known in America.

He first visited last fall, laying on a $100,000 performance of playing the Hollywood star, under the green-striped awnings of the Beverley Hill Hotel. Forty-six guests: Scientologists, Iggy Pop, Mick Rock doing headstands. "To eat baba ganoush and be himself, that's why he comes to us at the Larrabee," says Russell, the owner. Himself? David laughs goatishly – "har-har-har" – at the idea.

A Capricorn blazing under Saturn, Bowie trains that Black Star on himself like a spotlight. Even his drink is a warning that everything is choreographed, its boozy flare styled to the orange of his hair.

I wasn't going to ask if he remembered me, the dancer from Ohio, reading his palm then passing out in the black hash fog of Lindsay Kemp's apartment. But when he said, "Thank you, how are you?" in what Armstrong used to call his 'Piccadilly men's loo voice,' I knew he'd seen me for one of his ghosts.

Oh, David, give me your hands. He needs earthing. He's going by boat to Japan, because of a premonition he'll die in a plane crash. Everything's symbolic with him, as if he's sleepwalking through a drawing, like his favourite German Expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. Word is, last night he dressed like a geisha to fuck two baby groupies, playing out the song he'd written in the hotel last October, 'Cracked Actor', about a 50-year-old Hollywood legend getting starlets to "suck, baby suck". It's bitch'n fabulous, a stomping hangover of hard rock, you know? But you don't go and do that, for real. David portrays art killing the artist. Maybe it will.

The Image (1969), directed by Michael Armstrong, was David's first film, about a portrait that comes to life to haunt its artist. Armstrong called it a study of "the illusory reality" of the "schizophrenic mind of the artist." That reads now like an omen of what Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane are doing to David, you copy? A black-and-white, vaguely eerie short horror, David's acting, coming on like a homoerotic, perplexed mannequin, didn't help its vacancy. He was stabbed so violently (and sexily) by the artist, the film got an X rating. A bunch of us saw it at Jacey's Piccadilly, alongside a French sexploitation film, with David laughing at the porno audience's bafflement.

He had this martyred acting style, the straight clown. "Pure clown", he calls it. That's what he did next, in *The Virgin Soldiers* (1969), sombrely taking a man's punches. Lindsay Kemp, our holy trashbag of Kabuki, ballet and bongs, urged him to "exteriorise." David's passivity grew static-electric. Strong eyes, hands, feet. Like an old-timey star, like Dietrich, his stillness goaded you.

Lindsay's *Pierrot in Turquoise* (1969, Scottish TV) was a far-out pantomime, with David singing about a murderous love triangle. Half-dressed actors fucked; half-dressed sets collapsed. Lindsay encouraged David's view that there is no 'offstage'. He taught him makeup, costume, set design, language.

David, as Cloud, was magisterial and pained, projecting the cynical prophet voice of his song 'Cygnet Committee' – another pre-Ziggy, torn-apart visionary.

"I'm Pierrot. I'm Everyman," he'd say. "A canvas." Briefly, he staged his own Buddhist mime, *Jet-Sun and the Eagle*, backed by his song, 'Silly Boy Blue,' an Om-like droning dream of woodblock yak hooves and zither-like strings. But the public weren't hip to David the Buddhist. They wanted a singing picture, not a changing canvas. Oh, David, give me your hands!

In 1969, he pitched himself to musical TV producers with 'Love You Till Tuesday,' a promo of films, including 'The Mask' and 'Space Oddity'. In *The Mask*, David mimes an insecure young man who finds fame with a mask he picks up in a charity shop. "It brings," he narrates, "autographs, television, the lot!"

But he can't take off the mask and dies on stage, suffocated. David's miming is dorky: he walks like an albino Pink Panther, his black sash flouncing like a funky codpiece. But his jittery, shy face and narration are touching: another artist killed by his art.

Major Tom was the first such character that the public has identified with David – making the mask of 'Bowie' stick. He claims that watching Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* while stoned, he realised that he was an "isolationist" art-maker. Deep. There is that melancholy falling, in 'Space Oddity', a space guitar dirge with folksy-fluttering drums and a zooming Mellotron. His old band, Feathers – with his first love, Hermione Farthingale – had gone kaput. And his natal sun was in the 12th house. Paranoia!

But the film is a Woody Allen sex comedy. David plays both Major Tom, in silvery tights, and a 'Ground Control' NASA geek, in a clownish baseball cup. Yet, as Major Tom gets vamped by two *Barbarella*-style space foxes, the shocked numbness of his face gets to you. "The feeling of isolation that I had ever since I was a kid," he said, "was really starting to manifest itself."

That song feels like a prophecy. Now, he doesn't leave the hotel except to come here, isolated by fame, his band falling

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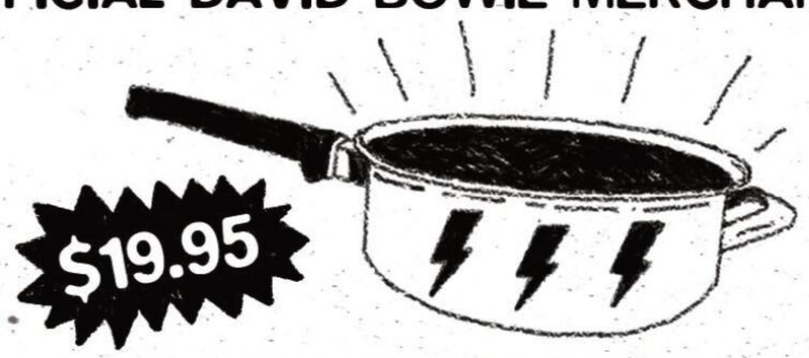

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apart. Last year, in Santa Monica, when he and Mick Ronson played it, front of stage on acoustic guitars, I barely dared to breathe. Oh, David, give me your hands!

Maybe, composing the soaring 'Life on Mars' for 'Hunky Dory' (1971) with a newborn son, David saw The Man – corrupt police, commerce types – with fresh eyes? It's David at his most intoxicated by the lies of film and of existence, like it's all make-believe, but we do it anyway. He's "hooked", like his protagonist, "the mousy girl", to the screen, Like any cynical suburban teenager, she feels her life is a film, "a saddening bore," where the police beat the wrong guy and idealism's for sale. But she can't stop watching. It's a deliriously lavish, suspenseful song, like if Liberace and Beethoven had scored a movie, with flying highs, stomach pit lows, drumbeat thunder and a Disney fairy tale ending. The film bums ("Mickey Mouse has grown up a cow") and thrills, and ends up tossed on the producer's floor, the telephone ringing.

'The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars' opens with 'Five Years', a lonely orchestral anthem with a mass-hypnotised chorus. The Earth's resources are dying. Life has become like a film, ("It rained and I felt like an actor"). The stage is set for Ziggy Stardust, David's caricature of an apocalyptical rock god. "Well-hung with a snow-white tan", Ziggy is embodied by Mick Ronson's guitar. It glitters like cooling magma in the song 'Ziggy Stardust' and rockets into a cosmic orgasm in 'Moonage Daydream'. Elsewhere, Ronson strums "malevolent and viscous," like David calls the Kubrick film influencing Ziggy's look, *A Clockwork Orange*. On stage, that distance frees David to stride, gargantuan, Ziggy's black-rimmed eyes baiting his audience like a cobra.

But if your audience doesn't see the distance, is it there? Nightly, he closes with 'Rock n Roll Suicide', a ghostly, floozy '50s guitar cabaret seduction, with shades of Edith Piaf and Jacques Brel, manically provoking audience frenzy. Prowling, he howls, "give me your hands" and flickblades his hips like a homicidal Elvis. Aladdin Sane is a schizophrenic, so David scrupulously puts on pose after pose, but the fans, punching to touch him, see only David.

'Drive in Saturday' on 'Aladdin Sane', is another pastiche doo-wop of a failed '50s American teen dream, with a defiantly sentimental rock 'n' roll chorus. Two lovers watch films in a metaphorical drive-in, trying to remember sex: "The sea that raged no more/Like the video films we saw."

In the Nuart Theatre tonight, they're showing George Lucas' *American Graffiti*. But David can't enjoy nostalgia straight, feels his strings being yanked. Coke amplifies that vibe of feeling played. He sees his friends as *tableaux vivants*, his naked groupies as *poses plastiques*.

'Lady Grinning Soul' on 'Aladdin Sane' gives me hope. The seductive Lady is Claudia Lennear, the hottest Ikette, Mick Jagger's 'Brown Sugar'. Between Mike Garson's music hall piano – Liszt on LSD – and David's Shirley Basseyesque operatic melodrama, it's a filmic, rippling mirage, scented with California. Trippily glimmering with cactus flowers, Spanish fans and black lace, it solidifies delectably into a real, sensual moment, David trying to read the mind of a woman from Pomona, sniffing her "musky oils". "When the clothes are strewn...." sings David, in falsetto, swooning like a woman, spellbound by the striptease of a Mexican guitar.

Oh, David, give me your hands!

Then it happens. David asks me, real polite, if he can borrow the felt-tips we keep in a jar for our kids. He draws a roller-skating Ziggy with a sinister baseball bat. He draws a woman with a child and a knife. A napkin falls. I bend to pick it up for him and we're about to speak, when she walks through the door, smiling like the sun. Through his yellowing mask of coke and booze, he slaps his thigh.

"Claudia!"

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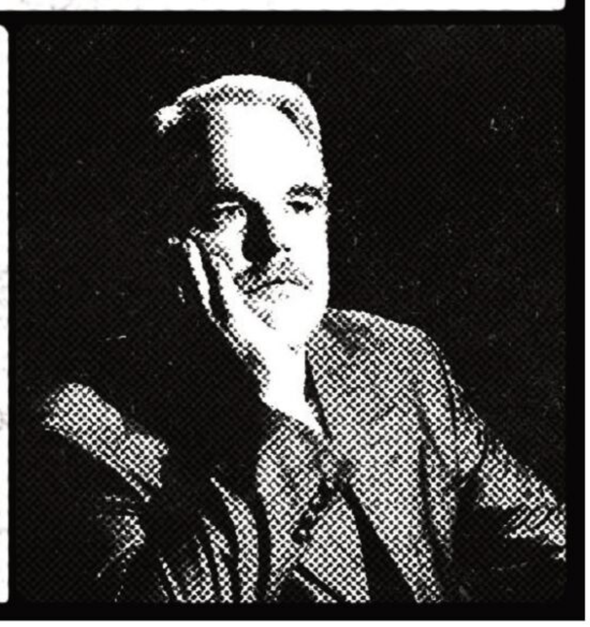

HOT TO TROT

GARY VALENTINE

THE KID WHO LITERALLY EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT

REPORTING BY CURTIS BROTHERCHILD

If there's two things we love in the Valley it's the ability to be topless in public, and the rise of a go-getting new talent. Introducing Gary Valentine, who many of you will already know from his star-making turns in Radley Wattinger's *Two Beds, Two Baths* and Rutger J. Blok's *This House is Haunted*. He can currently be seen tearing up the suburban theatre circuit in *Under One Roof* where he plays Tony, but it turns out that acting isn't the only string to his bow. When not assisting his mother in their PR and marketing firm, currently representing the off-strip crown jewel of Las Vegas, the Hacienda hotel, he's also cooking up his own get-rich-quick schemes with the help of friend and helpmeet, Alana Kane. He single-handedly kick-started the waterbed craze in California, and was instrumental in bringing pinball back to the people once its legalisation was confirmed in the local statutes. His Pinball Parlour caused such a furore – particularly its "Free Pepsi" deal for all attendees – that he generated queues around the block and brought much-needed trade to nearby local businesses and dining establishments. Jorgensen's Grocery, which backs on to the Pinball Parlour, gifted Gary a year's supply of brie for his efforts. Gary – always seen around town in his ice-white suit – is currently on hiatus from acting to focus on his business empire. We asked him to comment on this profile piece but he was too busy, instead sending us a Telex with the words, "Peace and love, baby. Peace and love."

JEROME FLETCHER IN ASSOCIATION WITH RAND MERCANTILE PRESENTS...

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SOUND OFF!

We pride ourselves at *LWLies* in offering a soapbox to you, the lowly reader. We ask you to "sound off" on a subject of your choosing, but one that may be pertinent to our rarefied audience. This week, Reseda High freshman Ronnie Zolondek has a few things to say about pinball.

This letter is for the attention of Councilman Joel Wachs.

Hello and thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to read this letter. My name is Ronnie Zolondek, and I'm a freshman at Reseda High, where I'm a good student. Mostly Bs and C-pluses, but with top marks in English, which my Dad says is the only subject that will ever be worth anything in show business. I'm going to be an actor one day, a tough guy-type but still deep, like James Dean. My Dad says it's important to know your type. I think I've got what it takes to go far, only because my friend Gary from biology class is an actor, and he's my age, and his head is full of rocks.

But I'm writing to you today as the Co-founder, President, Historian, Factotum, Snack-Bringer, and backup Treasurer (when the usual Treasurer, Freddy, is sick or grounded) of the Official Californian Pinball Decriminalization Society (OCPDS), Reseda Chapter. We're trying to get other chapters going all over town, but so far, we're the only one. If you or any of your staff would like to start their own chapter, I've included a guide to organizing and incorporating under our bylaws, which have gotten pretty long ever since Under-Secretary Rick's attempted overthrow two months ago. If not, that's okay too.

I'm reaching out to you in the hopes that we can get some serious political support behind our cause, which is the noblest one I can think of: full legalisation for the game of kings that is pinball. As a member of the City Council and maybe the new Mayor (fingers crossed!), you have the perfect position to bring attention to the greatest injustice of our time after racism, Vietnam and *Dark Shadows* getting cancelled. As you are surely already aware, pinball has been outlawed in Los Angeles since 1939 on the grounds of being a game of chance, part of the gambling that the city government wants to keep a desert away in Vegas. For my whole life until last year, I took it for granted that this was the way things ought to be.

That all changed last summer, when I visited my cousin Rodge in Texas and he brought me to his town's arcade. I was stunned to find out they had one of the forbidden pinball machines, right there next to the Skee-Ball lane, a baseball-themed Pinch Hitter table that the owner told me he's had since 1959. I was just as surprised to discover that this is probably the most fun thing ever invented. The thrill of a new high score, the pain of a missed ball – I think I finally understand how everyone else feels about baseball.

When the Mayor of New York City made this game illegal for his city one million years ago in the '40s, he said that pinball machines robbed, "the pockets of schoolchildren in the form of nickels and dimes given to them as lunch money," as if you're a sucker for playing at all. He was right, but only kind of – at the time, pinball was really just the plunger and ball, shot up onto the board and falling where it falls. It was pretty much all luck, unless you've got enough finesse with the plunger that you can nudge the ball right into the most high-scoring zones. Some people tried to get around this by tilting the table to make the ball drift where they want. These people are lower than pond scum.

The shameful practice of tilting was eliminated along with the reason for the ban in 1947, when the addition of the flipper to new pinball machines gave the player control. Hitting the ball at just the right time, using one flipper to set up a shot for the other, this all requires skill. Adults think this is a waste of time and money, but Mr Wachs, I swear that I've learned perseverance and discipline and all the other qualities I used to think were stupid when the phys-ed coach was yelling at me to get some of them.

By embracing pinball instead of rejecting it, California could put itself at the front of American culture. My Dad and I like to keep an eye out for pinball machines whenever we go to the movies, and you can tell that set-dressers use them to show that a location is cool. In *The Odd Couple*, when Walter Matthau brings Jack Lemmon to a bar for some loosening up, Lemmon beelines it straight for the pinball machine in the back. My dad says his favourite movie, a French gangster picture called *Rififi* I was too young to see when it played in theatres, has pinball machines all over the fancy Paris cafés. And there's the greatest movie of all time, *Tommy*, where the 'pinball wizard' is treated like he's Jesus Christ. Playing pinball puts him on a higher plane of being. I know the feeling.

Pinball is the future. They've started making tables modelled after TV shows like *Wagon Train* and *Bonanza* and *Star Trek*, though that last one doesn't really have anything to do with the show aside from the title. They could potentially make anything into pinball, with anyone's favourite characters or scenes printed on the design of the table. The possibilities are endless, and that's the beauty – a movie doesn't need any connection to pinball to take its form. Can you imagine a *Fiddler on the Roof* pinball experience? This is what's at stake.

This might not be as important as doing the budget or fixing crime, but to the generation of kids who could grow up playing legal pinball, it will feel like it is. This could be the best summer ever. All we need is your help.

Your single-issue soon-to-be-voter,

Ronnie Z

NEXT WEEK, SOUND OFF! SHOWCASES A LENGTHY BROADSIDE ON SLUMBER PARTY ETIQUETTE THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS.

ED. SINCE WE HAVE RECEIVED THIS LETTER FROM MR ZOLONDEK, THE CITY COUNCIL HAS MOVED TO DECRIMINALISE PINBALL.

ASTROLOGY NOW

See you among the stars!

OCTOBER 15, 1973

Featuring

MS LAUREL CANYON:

YOUR GUIDE TO THE STARS

Celestial greetings, my star-eyed loves! Ms Laurel Canyon here, your most humble seer, safely ensconced among the eucalyptus and scrub brush far above the glittering lights of scenic San Fernando.

The news this week has been all sorts of looney tunes: gas shortages, war in the Middle East, a crisis in the White House. When will it end? Who can say! This morning I stopped by the local 76 station on my way to yoga, but the line was so long I just turned right around and went home! Thankfully the guru is a close, personal friend, so I got a refund on the class - and the way things are going, 90 minutes of one-on-one Kundalini costs just about the same as a full tank!

With the Moon in Gemini, information comes to us rapid-fire, and with all the craziness afoot it can be hard to separate the proverbial wheat from the chaff. Thankfully, I've tapped into the cosmic broadcast and am excited to bring you transmissions from your astro guides.

What's in store for the signs? Read on to find out...

♈ ARIES

Always on-the-go, this week the universe is telling you to slow down dear Aries. You may experience a hitch in your travel plans, especially if they involve a cross-country road trip. Look into a more communal alternative, such as light rail. You never know: you may meet a tall, handsome stranger in the dining car of the Amtrak.

♉ TAURUS

Of all the earth signs, no one understands the good life like a Taurus. This week tap into your "bull-in-the-heather" tendencies and stay put! Think about a snazzy way to jazz up your boudoir – maybe with a waterbed? Nothing keeps you centered like a good night's rest. The world outside may prove too much for you, and besides – if you stay home, you won't get stuck in traffic.

♊ GEMINI

Does your left hand know what your right hand is doing? Not necessarily, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing! This week the astrological twins encourage you to try a new persona: change your hair 'do, or slip a pseudonym into your next bar crawl. As Oscar Wilde once said, "Give a man a mask, and he'll tell you the truth."

♋ CANCER

Break out of your shell this week, Cancer! I know you've been crabby lately, but with Halloween just around the corner it's the perfect time to show us your soft underbelly. Invite a friend out for a romantic dinner and see if the sparks fly – your powers of attraction are on high alert. Take heed, however: you'll have better luck if you pick a bistro within walking distance.

♌ LEO

No one brightens up a room quite like Leo! Planning a big project or announcement for this week? The stars tell me it's the perfect time to step into the spotlight and razzle-dazzle your captive audience. Consider making a grand entrance on roller skates – or better yet, a bicycle (if you can find one, they've been in short supply lately).

♍ VIRGO

Your logical tendencies have been working overtime, Virgo, but just because you look like a Vestal Virgin doesn't mean you have to act like one! This week your psychic energy is on fire, but with Venus in retrograde it pays to "pause" on any major changes to your appearance. Listen to yourself first before you decide to try on a bold new look.

♎ LIBRA

Maintaining balance is a Libra's raison d'être, but this week's hectic work schedule is testing your ability to delegate. Tired of doing it all by yourself? Grab that Rolodex and and start flipping: you may reconnect with an old flame who's eager to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty. Just because you're used to being the boss doesn't mean you can't let your guard down a little bit and ask for help.

♏ SCORPIO

No one can match a Scorpio's intensity when it comes to matters of the heart, but this week keep that poison stinger in check. Venus is retrograding through your house of partnerships, making miscommunication and arguments more common than usual. Before you take the next step with that special someone, make sure you're both on the same page: you don't want to mistake a good time for the genuine article.

♐ SAGITTARIUS

You can't choose your family, Sagittarius, but you can choose how to comport yourself around your kinfolk. Maybe the in-laws are driving you batty, or a mix-up with a sibling is creating strife at the Archer's mansion? This week when the fur flies, take five for yourself: amble down to the local playing field and smoke a joint in the bleachers, you'll feel much better after.

♑ CAPRICORN

Structure, authority and clear boundaries are must-haves for a water goat like you, Capricorn, but with everything so mixed-up it can be difficult to center yourself. This week take permission to let loose and shirk your duties a little bit. Say "no" to extra work, and protect your spare time with a rigorous passion – only you know what your limits are!

♒ AQUARIUS

It's your age, Aquarius! It may not seem like it now, but a time of harmony and understanding is coming your way. If you've been running on fumes lately, get ready for a big burst of energy! There isn't a challenge you can't face this week – whether it's nailing a big presentation at a convention, or navigating the twists and turns of everyday life from the driver's seat of your cosmic van.

♓ PISCES

Water, water, everywhere: that's the Pisces way! This week has you feeling overly-sensitive, but don't turn on the emotional hose just yet. With your ruling planet, Neptune, in go-getter Sagittarius this week, you'll have just enough fiery energy to turn that simmering cauldron into billowing steam! Keep the hearth going at home and good things will come your way.

A heads up to my faithful readers: tickets are selling fast for next month's Astro Seminar at the Shrine Auditorium in beautiful South Los Angeles! I've been diligently at work finalising the line-up of special guest speakers, including some familiar faces you may recognise from TV's most popular programmes!

Don't miss out on this star-studded event! To get your tickets, send a check or money order and a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

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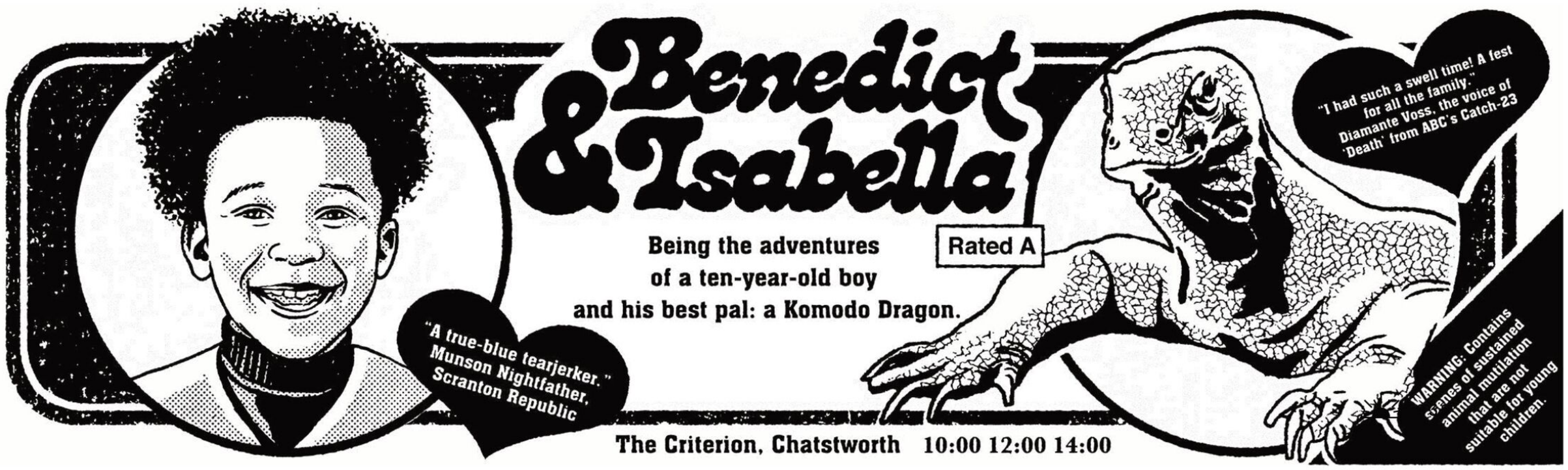


OBITUARY

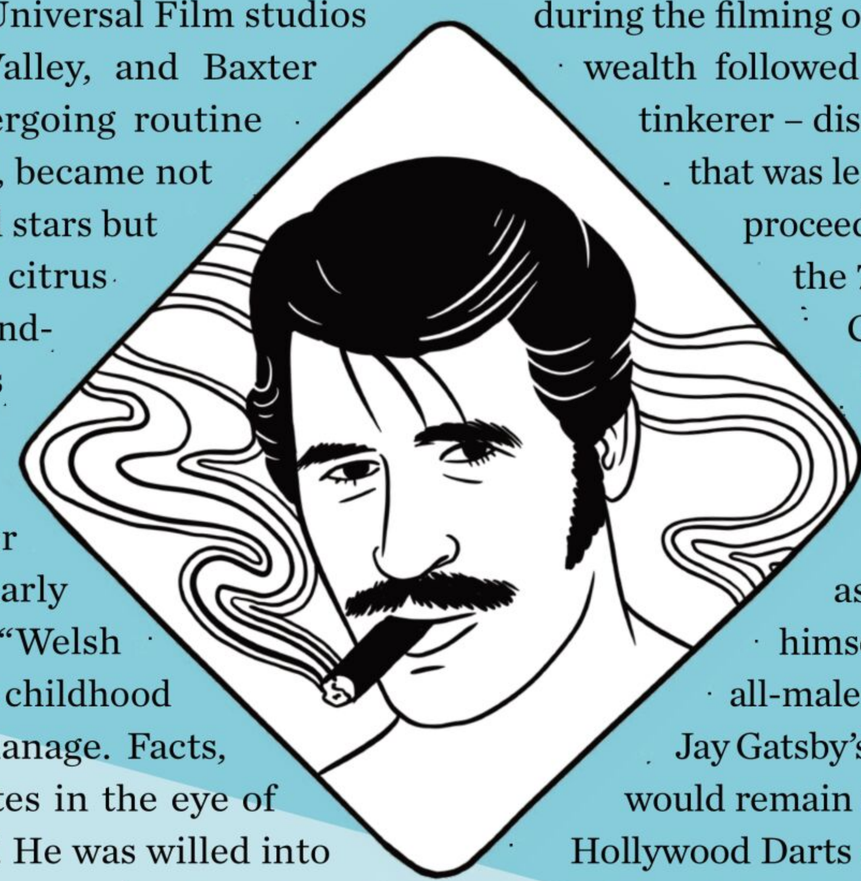
BAXTER CONRAD

1902 — 1973

Goodnight SWEET PRINCE

The late Hollywood enigma is eulogised by his official biographer and opium caddy, Lemuel Cruz-Campo.

"They call her Hollywood, Mister – ain't she a picture!" Like most founding myths it is both absurd and persuasive. But so legend has petrified the moment when Carl Laemmle, founder of Universal Pictures, came across the knee-high Baxter Conrad on a sun-dappled LA crossroads in 1912. "She sure is", said Laemmle, spying the boundless possibilities of the country before him. "Wanna be in pictures, kid?" And so it was – maybe – that Universal Film studios settled into the San Fernando Valley, and Baxter Conrad, who died this week undergoing routine chin replacement surgery in Gstaad, became not only one of Hollywood's most storied stars but also – synonymous as he was with citrus fruits, earthquakes, pornography, mind-altering experiments, fringe religions and "that silver-skirted sphinx" called cinema – its favourite son.



Conrad's life before the encounter with Laemmle is moot. In one early interview he claimed descent from "Welsh rodeo stock", but would later hint at a childhood spent in an offshore military orphanage. Facts, though, were never more than motes in the eye of Conrad's panoptic vision of himself. He was willed into being by chance and stardust at that crossroads. "Any attempt to know Baxter Conrad", claimed John Huston, who directed him opposite Gretchen McAlabaster in the 1940 World War Two genre-bender, *Trousers Maketh the Man*, "would be like coaxing smoke back into a lit cigar." Yet by 1929 he was known around the world.

Universal's *Those Dirty Little Bastards* shorts made Conrad a star. Over 850 were produced between '24 and '26, culminating in the garlanded *Whatever Happened to Those Dirty Little Bastards?* feature, which was filmed live in-the-round at Madison Square Garden. Yet it would be his trio of '29 successes that calcified his reputation in the eyes of the public. A Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his role in the Crimean War drama *The Scowling Ventriloquist* as Lt. Fulbright Fancy – whose signature line "Who's refereeing this tickle fight?" briefly entered the American lexicon – was followed by a much-publicised whirlwind romance with German cabaret chanteuse Uschi Wartenburg who he met during the filming of *Waltz of the She-Pumas*. Incalculable wealth followed when Conrad – ever the barnyard tinkerer – discovered an apricot-based truth serum that was leased in perpetuity to the US Army. The proceeds allowed him to purchase his Xanadu, the 750,000 acre Conrad Plantation (later Conradville) that became his sanctuary.

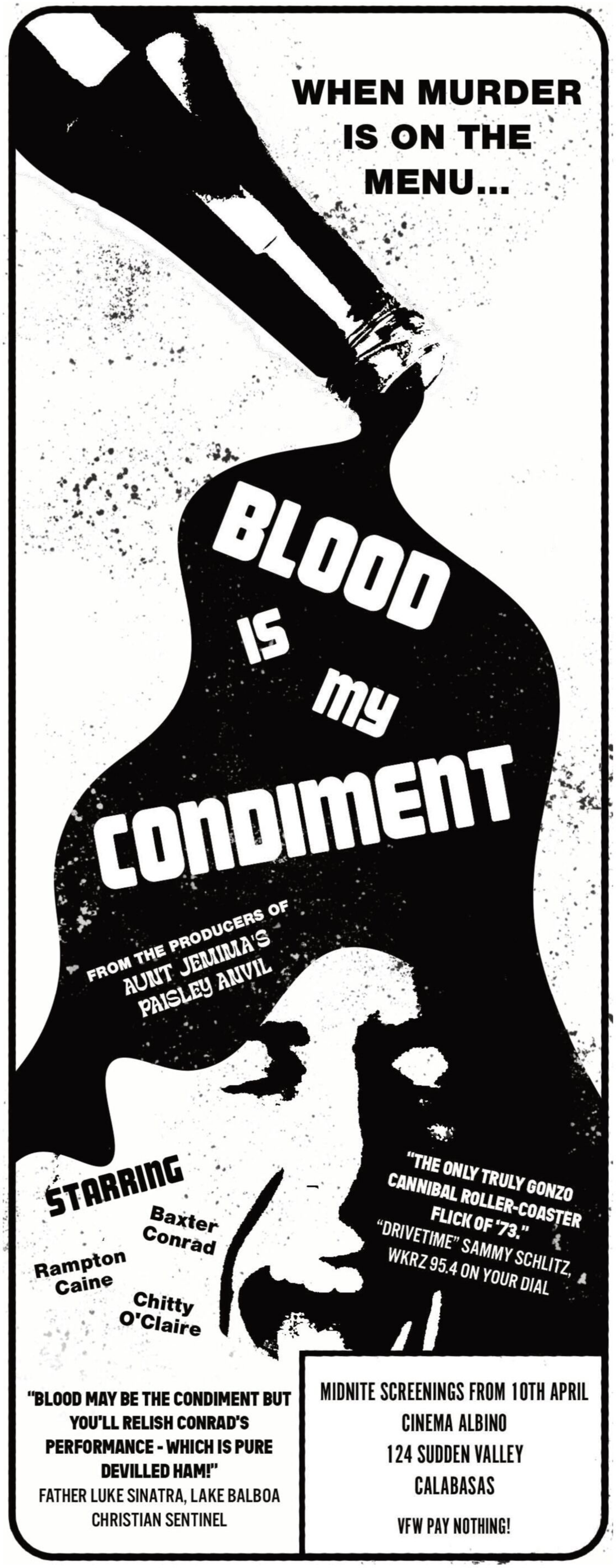
The marriage, as we know, didn't take. Conrad cited Wartenburg's first words to him after their betrothal – "Ich bin ein Satanist" – as irreconcilable differences. He threw himself headlong into life. His self-produced all-male *The Great Gatsby Sr.*, in which he played Jay Gatsby's richer, more mysterious older brother, would remain unreleased. He hosted the fashionable Hollywood Darts & Skittles Club every Friday at Heime Henderson's Sunset Bar & Pantry. He won the first of his joint-record seven Glendale Skirt-Chaser of the Year awards. His Oscar credentials and vast wealth – what he referred to as his "Clobberin' Sticks" – not only landed him the role of the Pedantic Lumberjack in *The Wizard of Oz*, but also meant he had the funds to have himself painted out of every frame of the finished film after deciding that Dorothy's fourth companion was "too fruity". A crowd-pleasing turn as sweet-toothed sniper Captain Dan Marzipan in *Hillbilly Blitzkrieg* reminded the public of his star power, but Conrad's star was wandering.

He never retained an agent, but kept an army of private detectives and *demi-monde* operatives, some based as far away as Rome and Tokyo. He was juiced in. He made millions dumping margarine on the Mexican Stock Exchange. He sold his patented Danzig Oscillator – a magnetic rifle that rendered chickens sterile – hours before the '51 "Egg Crash". Richard Widmark, his co-star in *Apache Backlash*, claimed, "If J Edgar Hoover had such pull, he'd be wearing a sequin ball-gown and sitting on the throne of England." Conrad also employed a rotating phalanx of swamis, plastic surgeons and body doubles. It has long been rumoured that the 'Baxter Conrad' who played homosexually-compromised air traffic controller 'Radar' Rex Salter in Douglas Sirk's 1949 melodrama *Intrigue Over Idlewild* was in fact a well-drilled decoy. And many have wondered if Conrad Baxter, Baxter Conrad's co-lead in the *Two Bozos...* film series, existed at all. Suspicions lingered even after Baxter was sentenced to 12 life sentences for interstate child laundering.

Obsessions fizzled as whims became passions. Conradville was emptied of good-time Charlies to make room for his acolytes from The Church of Pornography. Conrad gifted his priceless collection of pre-Bellum chastity belts to the Daughters of the American Revolution. He quit yodelling. After staring at a leopardskin cushion for 72 hours during an LSD trip at one of Rock Hudson's 'Third Eye' pool parties, he recast himself as a big game hunter, decamping to Botswana and reportedly funding the production of *The African Queen* just so he could pal around with Humphrey Bogart after a day on the Veldt.

Conrad's route back from Africa was circuitous. After a creditable 41st placing in the Paris-Dakar Rally – with Sammy Davis Jr. on navigation detail – he took a tramp steamer to Belize to cameo as Piccalliliy Pete in notorious cannibal flick *Blood is My Condiment*. He was the face of the Mexican government's anti-snuff movie campaign. But after the Toluca Tremors of 1969 reduced Conradville to rubble, he returned home. In his grief he conceived a thrice-weekly primetime "Mirthquake" Telethon on ABC. Yet even with stars such as Yul Brynner, Patti Lavender and Jack Huston as regulars in the 'dunk-tank' segment, audiences and pledges were less than seismic.

By now many of the 'Conrad' decoys had gone rogue, running up huge bills, trashing hotel rooms, brawling with Vietnam War protesters and leaving the actual Conrad's reputation in tatters. He was left with no choice but to alter his own appearance, opting to model his features on a man who helped him change a tire during a storm in 1922. He spent his later years wandering the backroads of the San Fernando Valley dressed in opulent red robes and asking strangers, "Have you seen Carl?" Six remaining loyal decoys were his pallbearers. "You Never Know" was all that was written on his headstone. A trickster even in death, Conrad willed the bulk of his estate to the winner of a globetrotting treasure hunt, the clues to which he claimed were seeded within his voluminous filmography. His legacy, like his life, looks set to be a fascinating adventure. *Baxter Artemis Conrad: 1902-1973*



THE White Suit

YOUR passport to DANDYISM

LOOKS INCLUDE:

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- DRUG KING PIN
- LOUNGE SINGER

SOILS EASILY KEEP AWAY FROM ALL MATTER

WASH WITH OTHER WHITES

Words by **CHRISTINA NEWLAND** *Illustration by* **LAURENE BOGLIO**

#20 Threads

The White Suit

What kind of person wears a white suit? A suit, after all, is a pretty ordinary item of traditional menswear that can be worn by all genders; it can be as ordinary as daily corporate workwear like Gregory Peck in the grey flannel variety. Make the suit white, though, and it invariably sticks out in the crowd. Cinematically speaking, the colour reflects a great deal of light on camera, making it particularly eye-catching. For a time in the 1930s and '40s, white dinner jackets for men were simply an on-trend choice for evening wear. Think of Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*, at least three iterations of James Bond from Connery to Moore to Craig, or the ever-dashing Harrison Ford in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Particularly in warmer climates, the '30s and '40s saw fashionable gentlemen in linen, silk, or cotton drill jackets of white, bone, cream and so forth. Often, these were worn with matching trousers or black ones, and featured dickie bows and carnations in the lapel.

When women wear white formalwear, it tends to be associated with sexual purity: to innocence; bridal gowns; and *broderie anglaise*. When men wear white formalwear, there can be a certain nod to the very same idea, though it tends to be more about purity of spirit than some staid notion of virginity. In the 1974 adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*, starring Robert Redford, the natty white suits of the wealthy bootlegger are not merely fashionable; they obliquely reference Jay Gatsby's own deep-seated romantic yearning and pure love for Daisy.

In another literary adaptation, Luchino Visconti's *Death in Venice* from 1971, Dirk Bogarde also represents a man who is hopelessly besotted in a white suit, though the tone is rather more sanguine. As aristocrat Aschenbach, his final moments – slowly expiring in a beach chair – are spent wearing a pristine white suit and matching boater hat, a kind of jauntily ironic symbol of his stymied hopefulness, his forbidden desire for young Tadzio, even as he dies.

By putting their actor in a white suit, filmmakers and costume designers can play with ideas of purity and 'goodness' that the colour is purported to symbolise. In the anti-capitalist parable from Ealing Studios, *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), Alec Guinness is an inventor for a textile company who creates a luminous, semi-radioactive white suit that is utterly incapable of wear and tear. At risk of disrupting the whole industry, he makes enemies of two trade unions and the fatcats who run the textile company. In the memorable conclusion, where Guinness runs from an angry mob wearing his invention, it becomes clear that this lone maverick is selfishly clueless to the fact that if his suit is manufactured, everyone will be out of a job. All that glitters is not gold, and a man in a shiny white suit may not provide all the innovation and progress he looks like he might. When his glorious invention abruptly falls apart in front of a watching crowd, it's clear the white suit isn't all it's cracked up to be.

So is the man in a white suit a character seeking purity and order, control and cleanliness, like Guinness or Bogarde? Is he a romantic dreamer who pretends at cutting sophistication, like Bogart in *Casablanca* or Redford in *Gatsby*? Or is he simply out to impress, a peacock like James Bond, sick of blending in with a conservative black or navy suit? Just as easily, he might also be a 19th century pith-helmeted colonialist like Michael Caine and Sean Connery are in 1975's *The Man Who Would Be King*. In this instance, white might mean that someone is not not-so-subtly reinforcing his whiteness as racial supremacy.

Or it might be more innocent: he might be a disco-dancing exhibitionist like John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*, simply wanting to make a fashion statement – a seventies throwback to the fashionable gentlemen of the '30s and '40s. In fact, the white suit is a choice made by costume designers and filmmakers that has almost endlessly shifting parameters for its meaning. Perhaps the most important thing that can be said about it is if a man is wearing a white suit, there will be some subtle significance to the costuming choice. Whether its an Elvis-style jumpsuit or an old-style tuxedo, the sartorial choice probably has something important to tell you

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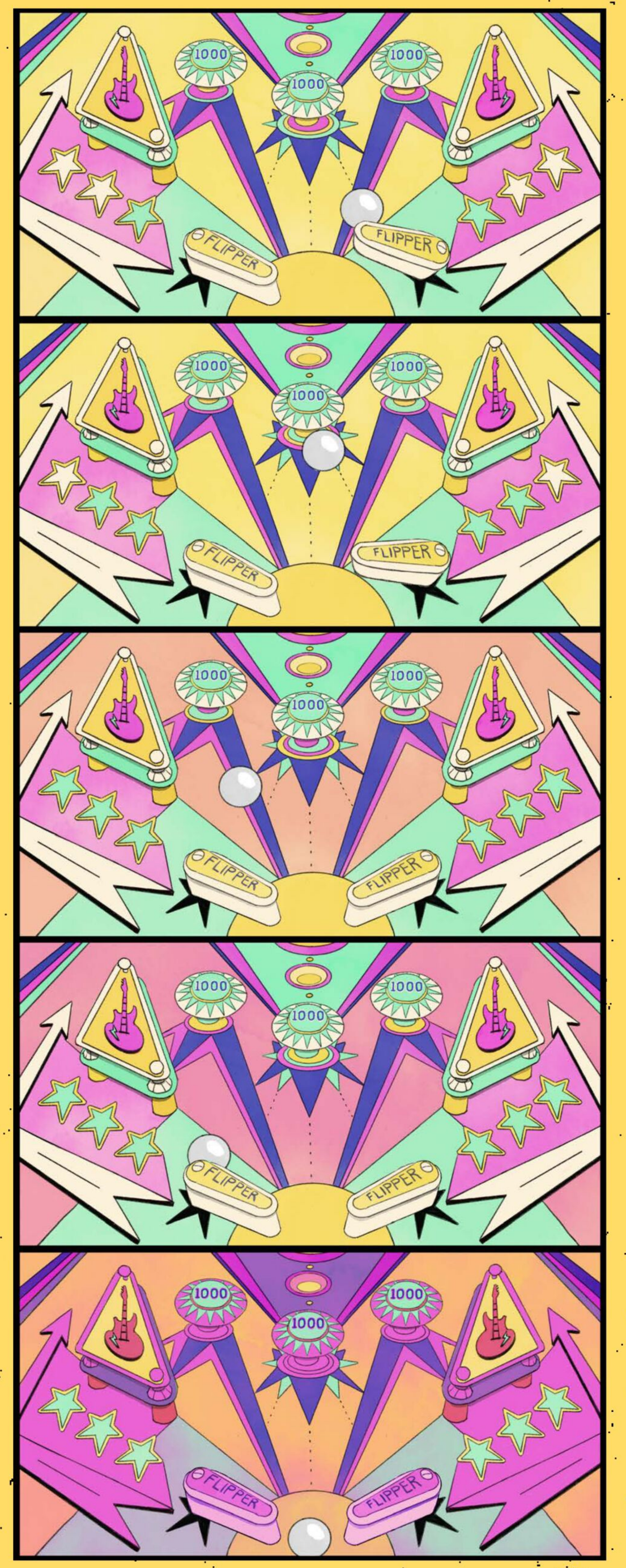
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The Licorice Pizza Issue

P.48

Feature: LWLies' Films of 2021

P.50

Profile: Johnny Knoxville

P.52

Memory Box

P.53

Taming the Garden

P.54

Minyan

P.55

The Electrical Life of Louis Wain

P.56

A Hero

P.57

Memoria

P.58

Interview: Apichatpong Weerasethakul

P.60

Cow

P.61

Cyrano

P.62

Petrov's Flu

P.63

The Eyes of Tammy Faye

P.64

The Souvenir Part II

P.65

Amulet

P.66

Interview: Romola Garai

P.68

Ailey / Mass

P.69

La Mif / The Duke

P.72

Parallel Mothers

P.73

The Tragedy of Macbeth

P.74

Feature: How We Made The Tragedy of Macbeth

P.78

Flee

P.79

Lingui, The Sacred Bonds

P.80

Interview: Guillermo Del Toro

P.84

Ava & Ali

P.85

Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy

P.86

Belfast

P.87

Zeroes and Ones

P.88

Home Ents

Words by **LWLIES STAFF**

LWLies Presents... The Top Ten Films of 2021

Cinema's back, baby! And 2021 turned out to be a vintage year for silver screen offerings.

10 DUNE DIRECTED BY *Denis Villeneuve*

Denis Villeneuve won't settle for anything less than the mantle of the next great adventure franchise in his gargantuan adaptation of Frank Herbert's seminal sci-fi novels. Chosen one Paul Atreides – played by Timothée Chalamet in irrefutable proof that he's one of the last true movie stars – must bring peace to a galaxy at war while avoiding the giant sand worms that want to gobble him up, a mission that whisks him through one marvel of production design after the next.

9 ANNETTE DIRECTED BY *Leos Carax*

Returning to the big screen in predictably singular style, French iconoclast Leos Carax gifted us a musical extravaganza care of his collaboration with pop-rock duo Sparks. Adam Driver delivers a performance for the ages as bad boy comedian Henry McHenry, who must raise his gifted daughter Annette while hiding a deep, dark secret. Of course it's a divisive film (we wouldn't expect anything less from Carax and Sparks) but undeniably one of the most inventive and absurd things we saw this year.

8 SUMMER OF SOUL DIRECTED BY *Questlove*

The sheer power that radiates from the screen while watching Questlove's *Summer of Soul* is enough to power an outdoor music festival in Harlem. This electrifying concert movie pieces together from footage of 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival which was – criminally – rejected by all outlets at the time, and contains bone-rattling sets from Sly and the Family Stone, Stevie Wonder, The Staples Singers and – as the grand finale, Nina Simone who sasses the whole park into paroxysms of joy.

7 MINARI DIRECTED BY *Lee Isaac-Chung*

This elegiac deconstruction of the modern family also draws in piercing insights on the realities of living and working as a

Korean expat in America. Steven Yeun excels as the patriarch who just wants to start a successful farm in Kansas, and while the elements are often against him, his soulful drive towards happiness helps to pull him and the fam through. Kid performance of the year.

6 THE SOUVENIR PART II

DIRECTED BY *Joanna Hogg*

British writer-director Joanna Hogg turns inward twice over in this sequel to her autobiographical 2019 film, as her on-screen avatar sets out to make what essentially amounts to the first *Souvenir*. But Hogg tones down the metafictional jiggery-pokery to focus on the maturation of a budding woman and artist, sampling sexual partners and figuring out how to run a set with the same waning uncertainty. With a stunning final shot, it's the ideal amendment to the millennium's greatest movie franchise.

5 THE CARD COUNTER

DIRECTED BY *Paul Schrader*

Continuing his return to form which started with *First Reformed*, Paul Schrader teams up with Oscar Isaac for this haunting portrait of an ex-soldier who leaves prison and turns to gambling only to discover he can't quite shake his dark past. It's an austere, meticulous rendering of a very bad man – something Schrader specialises in – with one of Isaac's finest acting turns to date, ruminating on notions of guilt, revenge, and whether or not there's any such thing as absolution.

4 PARALLEL MOTHERS

DIRECTED BY *Pedro Almodóvar*

The Spanish maestro revisits one of his career's foundational themes with a recently developed air of the elegiac in this paean to motherhood, in all its existential profundity. Penélope Cruz gives one of the year's finest performances as a woman ready to raise a child on her own, only to find the pregnant teen she met in the hospital drifting back into her life. Their poetic, soul-deep connection teases out fresh insights on the insecurities and neuroses inherent to molding another human being.

3 DRIVE MY CAR

DIRECTED BY *Ryūsuke Hamaguchi*

A thrilling three-hour journey into the mind of a depressive theatre director whose wife suddenly dies before she can reveal a secret about her life. Based on Haruki Murakami's short story of the same name, this is the film that confirms writer/director Ryūsuke Hamaguchi is the world-class talent we all thought he was when seeing 2015's epic *Happy Hour*.

2 LICORICE PIZZA

DIRECTED BY *Paul Thomas Anderson*

Two young not-quite-lovers – he's a 15-year-old actor/entrepreneur, she's in her mid-twenties and not sure what to do – come of age separately and together in '70s SoCal. Paul Thomas Anderson charts their unusual yet intimate bond through a series of comic episodes as astute about these kids' dumb, beautiful behaviour as their transformative time and place, a moment of oil shortages, strip-mall sushi, and legalised pinball.

1 TITANE

DIRECTED BY *Julia Ducournau*

Julia Ducournau's second feature sees a young sociopath with interesting erotic tendencies go on lam, where she forms a curious bond with a grieving firefighter – but *Titane* is so much more than its logline. An audacious story of love, loss and the desire to be accepted by another human being, Ducournau takes the absurd and makes it tender, creating an unconventional family out of the gore and gasoline that made headlines when she won the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

Words by **HANNAH STRONG** *Illustration by* **RAYA DEUSSEN**

Johnny Knoxville

Ahead of cinematic swansong Jackass Forever*, we doff a cap to one of Hollywood's most lovable goofs.*

Philip John 'PJ' Clapp was born in Knoxville, Tennessee on 11 March, 1971; the youngest son of Philip and Lemoyne Clapp, who also had two daughters. "I had raised two daughters, and PJ came 11 years later," Lemoyne would later explain to *Entertainment Weekly*. "At nine months old, he could climb up on his playpen and throw himself out on the floor. Luckily, we had carpet back then. But he never cried, even when he would get hurt." When he was 14, Clapp's cousin – country singer Roger Alan Wade – gifted him a copy of Jack Kerouac's 'On the Road'. Clapp then fell in love with the idea of being an actor.

Johnny Knoxville was born two decades later, after PJ graduated high school and traded the south for California, chasing dreams of stardom. He secured a prestigious scholarship to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Pasadena, but quickly dropped out, pursuing a more unconventional path to Hollywood, one paved with concussions and catheter rods. Knoxville was the pseudonym he took on while writing for *Big Brother*, a cult skateboarding magazine. He couldn't actually skate, but befriended the editorial staff – including young upstarts Jeff Tremaine and Spike Jonze. *Big Brother* was in the habit of producing video compilations that they would put out on VHS; usually of skateboarding stunts, but sometimes including pranks and other skits. 'Johnny Knoxville' was the pseudonym he used in *Big Brother Number 2*, which became the toast of the skate scene.

After the success of their *Big Brother* videos, Knoxville, Tremaine and Jonze, plus their co-conspirators Chris Pontius, Jason "Wee Man" Acuña and Dave England connected with CKY, a fellow group of daredevil rascals from West Chester, Pennsylvania. This brought Bam Margera, Ryan Dunn, Brandon DiCamillo and Raab Himself into the fold, and the group pitched their idea for a stunt and prank show to various television networks. While *Saturday Night Live* initially made an offer to Knoxville for a recurring solo pranks and stunts segment, he didn't want to leave his friends behind in Los Angeles. A lucrative bidding war between Comedy Central and MTV followed. For Knoxville, magazine covers followed: *Rolling Stone*; *Spin; GQ*; plus a slightly condescending profile in *The New York Times* in which the reporter marvels at Knoxville's good table manners as they dine at an upmarket French restaurant. Where Knoxville had once struggled to make it as an actor in LA, the success – and notoriety – of *Jackass* began to open doors. Over the course of three years, Knoxville landed a supporting role in blockbuster sequel *Men in Black II* (he played an alien with two heads, a lackie to Lara Flynn Boyle's power-hungry extraterrestrial invader), gigs with John Waters and Catherine Hardwicke, and lead roles in a string of fairly underwhelming bro comedies.

It was Knoxville's involvement in the *Jackass* movies that proved most fruitful: *Jackass: The Movie* netted Paramount a $80 million return on their $5 million investment, while *Jackass Number Two* saw similar results four years later. But it was *Jackass 3D* – with its pioneering 3D camera technology – that proved the most successful, with a $171 million box office on a $20 million budget. Defying expectations, the films have also become better received with each installment, as critics have warmed to the rude, crude shenanigans, and the gang's execution has improved.

This sets the stage for a grand return for Knoxville and company. For years the prospect of a *Jackass* reunion was teased by various members of the gang, with all parties enthusiastic about the prospect of putting themselves in harm's way again; shooting began in March 2020, but after a week the shoot was postponed due to Covid-19. After wrapping, the pandemic forced a further delay in release, from September 2021 to February 2022, but fans were able to sate their appetite with *GQ*'s affectionate profile of Knoxville in May, in which he reflected on his strange career, including the time he broke his penis filming a tribute to Evel Knievel and had to use a catheter every day for three years.

People talk a lot about Tom Cruise's enthusiastic, borderline nihilistic commitment to stunts, but the *Jackass* guys have displayed an equally full-bodied enthusiasm (and unusually high pain tolerance) over the years. And Knoxville's charisma has made him an enduring figure of Tinseltown legend. "He wasn't the most talented or the funniest," *Big Brother* editor Dave Carnie said of Knoxville back in 2001. "But as far as being a jackass, he's A-1, certified, the best jackass I know."

Memory Box

Directed by **JOANA HADJITHOMAS, KHALIL JOREIGE**
Starring **MANAL ISSA, JADE CHARBONNEAU, RIM TURKI**
Released **21 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
A film that promises to be formally daring in its approach to generational memories. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
Thin characterisation means there's no dipping-the-madeleine moment of emotional nostalgia. **3**

IN RETROSPECT.
Still, there are so many textures at play here – a real sense of cinematic alchemy. **4**

In this thoughtful and textured examination of one family's approach to archiving memories, directing partners Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige draw upon their vast multimedia expertise to craft a moving tale about intergenerational documentation and its poignant implications.

Set in present day Montreal, Maia (Rim Turki) is single mother to teenage daughter Alex (Paloma Vauthier). When a box containing Maia's old diaries, albums and cassettes is mailed to her by an old friend – to whom she had entrusted these treasures when she fled Lebanon in the late '80s – Alex decides to pore over her mother's keepsakes in private. From this viewpoint, the film takes daring leaps into several mediums to transport us into Maia's adolescence (where she's played by Manal Issa) in Beirut, at once alive with the music of The Stranglers and fraught with fear as the country's civil war raged on.

A patchwork of deftly stitched vignettes, the film is successful in analysing how two disparate generations can connect over their parallel obsession with audiovisual documentation. Videos, photographs, holograms, internet searches, phone notifications, selfies, dreams: the film is a labyrinth of mediums that reflect the slipperiness and fallibility of memory. It's also, fittingly, an oblique ode to archivation and the preservation of physical media – it offers a welcome argument against facile cries of 'live in the moment!' as well as a dutiful appreciation of the emotional weight that can be attached to compulsive record-making.

Hadjithomas and Joreige are artists as much as they are filmmakers, and their disciplines span between documentaries and photographic installations to sculptures and lectures. Needless to say, their artistic dexterity is on full display in *Memory Box*. Gunfire in Lebanon becomes light damage on a piece of film: a fogged photograph – developed 30 years after it was taken – acts as a stand-in for a faded memory, the intrinsic and the intangible rendered in pixels. While Alex bonds with her grandmother over their Lebanese culture by eating kibbeh and rolling vine leaves, the film pays due diligence to the particular disorienting power in disembodied voice recordings in triggering emotions across generations.

While it's joyous to experience the texture of such memories echoed in the fabric of the filmmaking, perhaps *Memory Box* struggles to coalesce its formal rigour with fleshing its characters into something beyond the invocation of digital ghosts. As a piece of fiction, there's little to truly be swept up in in terms of plot or characterisation – the framing device in particular leaves little room for Alex to grow in the audience's mind as someone who does anything other than turn the pages for us, as it were. Falling short, too, is any substantial interrogation of the effects of the Lebanese Civil War: for Maia, personally, or her generation as a collective. But despite a prioritisation of visual effects over story, *Memory Box* makes a compelling case for chronicling the big and small parts of your life, if only to share with generations to come. **STEPH GREEN**

Taming the Garden

Directed by **SALOMÉ JASHI**
Released **28 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
Intrigue in this doc was whipped up after its rave Sundance premiere.

ENJOYMENT.
Contemplating its subject with an unhurried pace makes for an entrancing watch.

IN RETROSPECT.
Magnificent visuals and a moving tale of arboreal anthropomorphism.

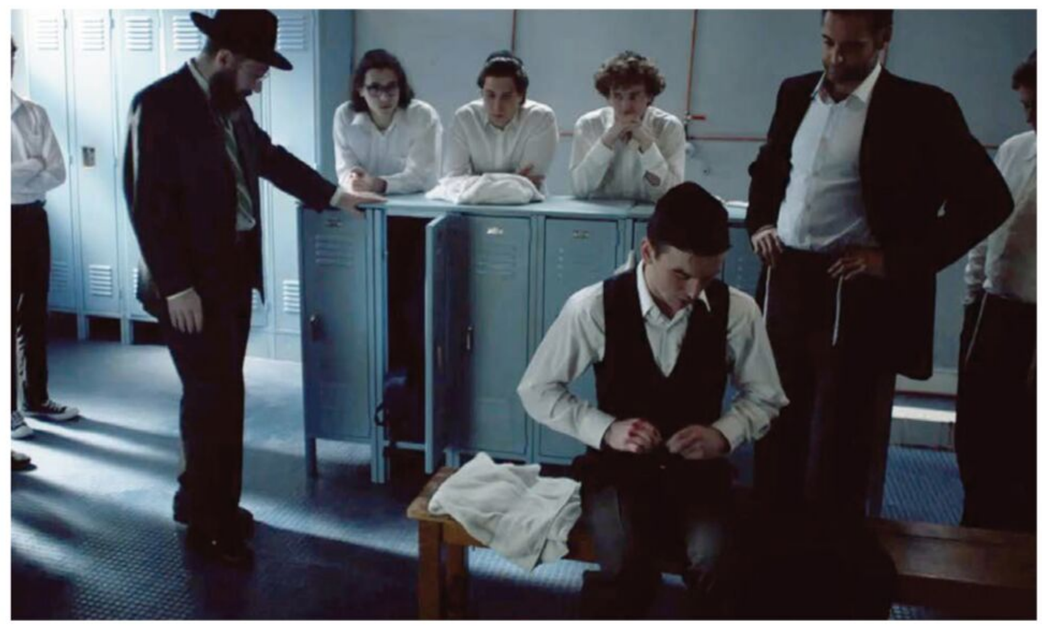
Nestled in the rugged rural landscape of Georgia the subject of Salomé Jashi's striking documentary falls to the floor with an almighty cry. Birdsong is lost to the roar of chainsaws and blue sky is replaced by plumes of billowing grey smoke as an ancient, deeply rooted tree is dug from its Georgian homeland. At the heart of *Taming the Garden* is this otherworldly venture: centuries-old trees, as tall as 15-storey buildings, are uprooted and transported through villages, over hills and across the sea to end up in the garden of a billionaire.

Overseeing this process is Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgia's former Prime Minister whose presence is felt only through murmurs. However, his pervading power is clear via his unchallenged ability to pluck hundreds of sacredly rare trees for his own horticultural desires. In observing this unique migration process, Jashi's film unearths a bizarre excavation project in hypnotic detail. Meditative, static aerial shots and a patient edit from Chris Wright frame a sea of treetops with an ethereal mystique before the camera follows the tree's spellbinding journey on foot. Alongside co-cinematographer Goga Devdariani, Jashi contends with the changing shape of the landscape before the camera as sacred nature and manufactured machinery share the frame. However, there is one particular moment that captures this paradoxical beauty: a wide shot of a giant tree, roots wrapped and tied to a barge ferry, floating alone in the Black Sea. The visual spectacle is reminiscent of the humongous hauled riverboat in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*. Here, Jashi's camera gazes in a mixture of awe and disbelief, as if it already knows this is the film's defining shot.

Elsewhere, the film's observant lens joins hired contractors around campfires and locals in dim living rooms to discuss the fate of these trees: whether this is a state-funded operation, a personal quest for Eden or a spiritual project to live longer. For the trees, Ivanishvili pays for new, accessible roads for the small towns, yet many residents are vocal in their resentment of the bribe. In one sequence, locals gather in a funeral procession to bid farewell to one of these huge entities. Indicative of the director's approach, these moving moments are shot with a fly-on-the-wall style that maintains a strict distance. In turn, their unfiltered candour leads to raw admittance of the unethical power imbalance and economic instability that underscores this documentary.

With a hypnotising soundscape from Philippe Ciompi and Celia Stroom, Jashi's enchanting portrait of man's power over nature is shrouded with mystery. Though Jashi's directorial position is completely rescinded, there remain so many unanswered questions surrounding the film. How did Jashi gain access to Ivanishvili's project? No idea. Does she know the true purpose of plucking hundreds of these sacred trees? We never really find out. *Taming the Garden* is ultimately a work of excavation itself, unearthing the gratuitous acquired ownership of natural landmarks and community monoliths in a condensed 90 minutes. **EMILY MASKELL**

Minyan



Directed by **ERIC STEEL**
Starring **SAMUEL H. LEVINE, RON RIFKIN, CHRISTOPHER MCCANN**
Released **7 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
Eric Steel has previously directed two great documentaries, The Bridge *and* Kiss the Water.
3

ENJOYMENT.
With far too many parallel plot points, Minyan *never fully leans into its existential quandaries.*
2

IN RETROSPECT.
An easily forgettable, painful waste of potential.
2

Judaism states that, in order to institute a synagogue, 10 adults must come together to form a 'minyan' – a traditional prayer circle. In more orthodox strains, these adults need to be male and older than 13. Though simple by definition, the principle is far from it in practice, particularly in 1980s Brooklyn where the Jewish community consisted of immigrants still dealing with post-war traumas that kept once-faithful followers from returning to the teachings of the Torah.

Having previously made documentaries, *Minyan* marks Eric Steel's first venture into narrative filmmaking. This queer coming-of-age drama is adapted from David Bezmozgis' eponymous short story, and sees 17-year-old David (Samuel H Levine) stranded somewhere between two insular identities as a Russian Jew and a young gay man coming to terms with his sexuality at the height of the AIDS crisis.

Neither fully here nor there, the teenager spends his days between parallel yet contrasting spots. In the early hours, he conducts menial tasks in the neighbouring apartment shared by two elderly Jewish men whose relationship floats on a heavy cloud of unspoken speculation. As the hours draw in, David heads to a local gay bar, tentatively testing the waters as what was once a meagre pool of interior passion slowly expands into a wide, expansive ocean.

Steel's film is drained: of colour; of depth; of emotional reach. Everything is a tad surgical, a calculated narrative that attempts to create an existential rumination on life and yet feels itself lifeless. Washed up apartments and freezing beaches blend under an overpowering score reminiscent of '90s erotic thrillers – the loud saxophone desperately seeking to mask the all-pervading blandness.

For a film built on the importance of what is left unsaid, *Minyan* far too often relies on overexposure. Steel goes from the harshness of religious school to adulterers caught red handed to tense funerals with all the subtlety of an elephant on a unicycle. When the director occasionally allows for the characters to digest the immensity of their struggles, searching for comforting camaraderie in the few who relate to the isolating specificity of their predicament, the film comes to life.

This is even truer of the exploration of the metaphor built around the minyan, one beautifully enveloped in a primal need for companionship – be it either through mandatory traditions or natural yearnings. "Thieves, adulterers, homosexuals... I take them all. Without them, we would never have our minyan," says the rabbi when David, at last, asks the unquestionable questions. The survival of the communal depends on the integration of the individual – whomever they may be.

It is hard not to remain hopeful that, at some point, *Minyan* will reach an emotional apex of glorious scale. Perhaps, one eagerly tells oneself, the first and second acts are not bland – they are merely slow-burning. Perhaps, all loose ties will be tied in one bountiful burst of inspiration. Perhaps. Alas, all that is left is a nagging hunger for what it could have been. **RAFA SALES ROSS**

The Electrical Life of Louis Wain

Directed by	**WILL SHARPE**
Starring	**BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, CLAIRE FOY, ANDREA RISEBOROUGH**
Released	**1 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
A star-studded cast sets the bar high. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
There is rarely a dull moment in this colourful biopic. **3**

IN RETROSPECT.
Constant recourse to oversentimentality lets the story down. **3**

The director of acclaimed TV series *Flowers* and *Giri/Haji*, Will Sharpe has a penchant for dark subject matters with a comedic edge. His latest feature, *The Electrical life of Louis Wain*, follows in the same vein as it traces the life of the eponymous figure (Benedict Cumberbatch), an 'outsider' artist whose main focus of study is cats. The biopic form takes on a playful and colourful eccentricity, mirroring the personality and kaleidoscopic worldview of its protagonist.

Born in 1860, with a cleft-lip and latent schizophrenia, Wain becomes the breadwinner of his family after the death of his father. He is suddenly responsible for five unmarried sisters and an invalid mother. But his overzealous imagination and frenetic impulses to create art – rather than find employment – means he cannot live up to the expectations of his family, most of all his frustrated oldest sister Caroline (Andrea Riseborough).

Wain's surreal and technicoloured vision of the world contrasts with the black-and-white strictures of a rigid Victorian society, a vision that shows a lack of compassion towards those who transgress social norms. Wain and his family are ostracised in a world of gossip-loving curtain-twitchers, and it is against this hostile backdrop that Wain's love for cats develops. He identifies with the strays, who at that time, were not domesticated pets, but regarded as vermin.

Fortunately, Wain's talent for drawing at lightening speed attracts the attention of Sir William Ingram (Toby Jones), the editor of *Illustrated London News*, who gives him a position as staff illustrator. Yet every time Wain takes a step forward in life, his psychological distress (his mind a tempestuous, "screaming hurricane") thwarts his familial and professional relationships. When he marries the penniless and cat-loving governess, Emily Richardson (Claire Foy), who in real life was 10 years his senior, it causes a scandal amongst the locals.

At the heart of the film is a love story between Wain and Emily, one that morphs into a tale of grief when Emily is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Cats serve as a metaphor, accentuating his estrangement from the world and recalling memories of his wife and their beloved cat Peter. But it is the film's adoption of too many themes – from cats to the potential of electricity – that hinders the story. Despite the strong performances by Cumberbatch and Foy, the complex weaving together of symbolic strands feels contrived; they hang loosely together by a precarious thread.

The film is enjoyable largely because of the strong casting and unexpected star cameos, including a famous rock god (hint: with an Australian accent) playing HG Wells. But the power of the human story is let down by oversentimentality, which the score by Arthur Sharpe doesn't help. Cat-lovers will likely find something here to latch on to, but the film may not convince everyone that Wain was an exceptionally significant artist, let alone that it's an ideal use for Sharpe's talents. It is nevertheless a touching human story, celebrating an overlooked outlier. **LYDIA FIGES**

A Hero

Directed by **ASGHAR FARHADI**
Starring **AMIR JADIDI, MOHSEN TANABANDEH, SAHAR GOLDOOST**
Released **7 JANUARY**

This film follows Rahim Soltani (Amir Jadidi), a young father incarcerated in debtors' prison for failing to pay back lender Bahram (Mohsen Tanabandeh). During a two-day leave period, Rahim tries to cobble together the sum he owes his ex-business partner in exchange for leaving prison. But when Bahram refuses his partial payback offers, Rahim engages in increasingly elaborate ploys to raise the near-insurmountable sum. Soltani knows his freedom is on the line, as well as the care of his vulnerable young son, but can't help fighting for his battered reputation.

Rahim and his secret fiancée Farkhondeh (Sahar Goldust) then construct an elaborate tale of Rahim's heroism in order to exact some goodwill from Bahram. Thanks to social media, Soltani becomes a folk hero. But it doesn't all go to plan.

In its construction, *A Hero* is little like the Safdie brothers' *Uncut Gems* by way of Abbas Kiarostami, the seminal Iranian director whose calm observational style has evidently influenced Farhadi here. There's very little camera movement: Farhadi allows his characters to play out their fears and anxieties in rooms and corridors while we sit back, powerless and detached. A more dynamic approach might give the impression that Rahim has any control over his fate. in truth he's a passive observer of his own life.

Kiarostami's fingerprints are also present in the way *A Hero* deals with truth and illusion. Rahim and Farkhondeh weave together so many desperate falsehoods that they lose any sense of the truth. In another specific way, Iranian cinema appears to be in a similar place to the American cinema of the 1970s: actors are cast according not to their chiselled cheekbones but by the sheer number of lines on their faces. That's most true of Jadidi, a clean-cut leading man who is near-unrecognisable here.

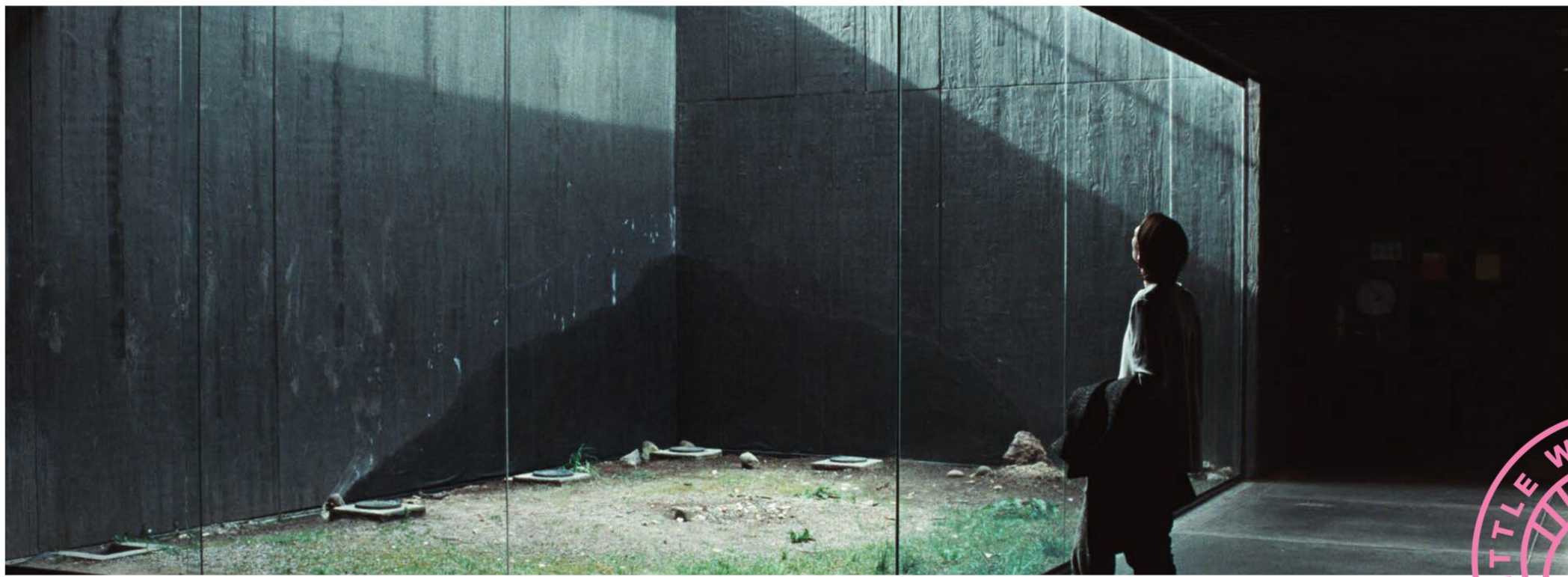
Having already spent three years in prison, Rahim is at the bottom of the social pile. His endeavour transforms him into an unlikely warrior in a culture war between law-and-order money lenders and the vulnerable borrowers whose ambitions require the trust of others. That precarious status quo evokes the work of Charles Dickens, whose father spent numerous stints in the debtors' prison of the Victorian era, and even Charlie Chaplin, who gets a blink-and-you'll-miss-it cameo.

Yet the stratified social system of *A Hero* can't be confused with any sort of political dissonance. Farhadi has always played a careful game in order to have his deeply authentic films permitted in his rigid home country. Though this film was produced largely with French money, the director is still clearly interested in telling Iran-centred stories. We should be so lucky: there's no one doing it better. **ADAM SOLOMONS**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Farhadi is always worth a watch, especially when he's on home turf.

ENJOYMENT. 4
For what first seems like a conventional drama, the deep-seated tension is thrilling.

IN RETROSPECT. 4
Amir Jadidi's haunted-behind-the-eyes performance stays with you, whether or not you want it to.



Memoria

Directed by APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL
Starring TILDA SWINTON, ELKIN DÍAZ, JUAN PABLO URREGO
Released 14 JANUARY

The idea of being attuned to the vibrations of the past, of other times and other lives, becomes literal in *Memoria*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first feature film made outside of his native Thailand. In this case it's Colombia – a country with its own embedded history of violence and lush jungle biome. Like the best of the director's work, *Memoria* lulls you into its rhythms, gives you the sparse outlines of an intellectual framework, then hits you with the full weight of accumulated lyricism that must be pure cinema.

The film opens with Jessica (Tilda Swinton), a British woman in South America, possibly grieving and possibly starting an orchid farm, awoken by a sound. It's like an explosion, not so different from the backfiring bus that sends a pedestrian diving to the ground in the middle of a crosswalk, but not quite. And how odd: no one else can hear the sound, though in her encounters at the university where she's researching bacteria and fungus, and at the hospital where she's visiting a sick friend, there are traces of things below the surface. Soldiers guard the road into the mountains; a chance encounter with an archaeologist reveals a trove of bones still carrying the wounds of 6,000 years prior; car alarms ring, agitated by an obscure stimulus.

The sound that plagues Jessica is like a concrete orb dropped into a metal cylinder full of seawater, as she explains to Hernan (Juan Pablo Urrego), a sound engineer helping her digitally engineer a recreation of her... memory? Hallucination? The scene, in both its sleepy, meditative pace and attempt to aurally evoke an absence, seems a reflection on Apichatpong's own filmmaking. They're doing sound design, trying to conjure the noise that haunts her – and it's surely significant that Hernan uses a stock library of audio effects that includes sounds like a wooden bat hitting a duvet over a human torso.

Travelling out of the city, Jessica meets another Hernan (Elkin Diaz), a peasant with a perfect memory and a mystical ability to connect to the vibrations of the past. Apichatpong's deliberate pacing, which is meditative, in the sense of consciously slowing your thoughts in order to better seek transcendence, reaches its resonant peak in extended long takes of a man lying on his back, barely breathing, not even dreaming (no thoughts, just vibes), and a deeply moving scene in which Diaz and Swinton clasp hands, and a rush of non-diegetic sound – nature, dialogue, memories – flow through the soundtrack and through her.

Apichatpong is on the record as saying that he doesn't mind if you doze off at his films; I will raise my hand and say that I'm pretty sure that the part of this sequence where I heard my own parents' voices was not part of the movie. But then again... was it? **MARK ASCH**

ANTICIPATION. 4
Each new Apichatpong film is a tectonic plate-shifting event in world cinema.

ENJOYMENT. 5
Wholly compelling delve into the inner mind via the shimmering looking glass of cinema.

IN RETROSPECT. 5
Did I interact with this movie, or did the movie interact with me?

Interview by **MATT TURNER** *Illustration by* **RAYA DEUSSEN**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

The Thai slow cinema maestro explains how he made his new film Memoria *as a pure and open piece of cinematic collaboration.*

After making eight features in Thailand, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Colombia-set feature *Memoria* is the first filmed outside his homeland. With Tilda Swinton as its star, it is also the first with a famous face at the centre. We spoke to the director about what instigated this new direction.

LWLies: How did you end up making a film in Colombia? Apichatpong: I was in Colombia in 2017, and after that became determined to try something outside of Thailand. I stayed there for three to four months, something that I hadn't done before when visiting places just for festivals. At the time I was experiencing symptoms of 'exploding head syndrome'. I don't know if this was because I was heartbroken or because of something else happening in my personal life, but I definitely wasn't feeling myself. To fulfil my existence, I fed my soul with stories from the people that I met.

What was it like to approach the country from an outsider perspective? It felt good to be an outsider. You can look at it in two ways. You can say that you need the film to be authentic and be afraid that, as an outsider, you won't be able to show the truth. Or you can look at it the other way and see that as an outsider, you cannot penetrate this world anyway. My approach was to just enjoy the experience. I really didn't seek to dig deep. That's why I felt that Tilda [Swinton]'s character could maybe be partly like me, drifting, disconnecting, and spending a lot of time listening and trying to reconnect with herself.

When did Tilda Swinton join the project and what did she bring to the role? She has been involved for more than 10 years. As a friend, every time we met socially was a chance for me to familiarise myself with her. This is the same way that I work with my Thai actors. I can't operate by just coming to the set and shooting. That is impossible.

Tilda has this expression: "Dull not to", which means she will say yes to everything. That's the way she approached working with me, always saying: "Yes, yes, yes". I really adore this about her. I also need an actor who feels that making a film is not only about being in front of the camera, but about spending time together and fostering a sense of collaboration.

Could you talk about the scene near the end where Tilda's character is telepathically hearing all sorts of different sounds? There were many ways that that sequence could go wrong. I wrote a sound script and tried it with the actors, using various sound sources and trying to match the sonic shape of two people tuning into each other. It's really a delicate balance because the viewer would be pushed out of the film if the sound was too much. We tried for many months to get it right.

That scene was filmed on one of the final shooting days. I think Tilda put all her memories of the production and her reflections of Colombia into it, and also her own grief and happiness. We were shooting around 14 minutes for each angle, and it was really magical because I was whispering to her while she was moving silently around. Eventually, some of her memories triggered her tears.

It sounds almost like choreographing a dance scene between Tilda and the camera? It's like watching a live improvised performance. Each take was long, and the crew members cried after the end of each take. I think partly because it was the end of the shooting as well.

I was amazed by Tilda because she was not method acting. When I said cut, she was straight back to herself. We shot the scene at this house up on the hill which had a pig den next to it. That same afternoon, new piglets were born. When I said cut, Tilda jumped up straight away to go out and play with the piglets. This is what I mean. A film is not only about the shooting but the whole life that exists around it. For many crew members, I think the experience was fairly laid back and that really shows in the film. Somehow everything was so smooth on set; everyone loved everyone. Tilda was instrumental in glueing everyone together because she would always find a reason to party. She would say: 'Okay, 100 rolls of film shot, let's have a party,' and then she would decorate and cook. It was a magical time

Cow

Directed by **ANDREA ARNOLD**
Released **14 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
Andrea Arnold's contribution to the BCU (Bovine Cinematic Universe).

ENJOYMENT.
RIP my will to listen to any Kali Uchis song, ever.

IN RETROSPECT.
Udderly mooving.

Andrea Arnold's films are never an easy ride. She has said that, "people have quite a physical experience with them". A master of kitchen-sink realism, her uncompromising and exploratory style focuses on experiences of women in austere scenarios fighting for control over their lives. Engaging, painful and beautiful, her work tends to have a visceral after-effect, and such is the case with her first documentary, *Cow* – a self-professed labour of love.

The meat and dairy industry is a system that tears families apart. It strips maternity away from its most docile victims. It's under these circumstances that single mother Luma sees her newborn taken away from her, merely a few hours after giving birth. The camera follows Luma from behind, gazing on as an umbilical cord sways back and forth while her cries grow increasingly louder. Her pain is as ineffable as it is expressive, gauged through a series of looks and cries that appear to convey anguish. There is no commentary, no narration, and farm workers are (ever so briefly) shown in a neutral light, getting on with their jobs which involve various bodily intrusions, horn burning, forced impregnations and milk extractions. The hyperspecific pop sound of Kali Uchis, Jorja Smith and Mabel reverberates from the farm radio speakers – a jarring soundtrack to the cows' everyday existence within a cramped industrial space.

Shot in Arnold's characteristic handheld style, which evokes a sense of immediacy, the camera rests on Luma's eye level and seldom breaks away from her perspective. The camera's presence is neither invasive nor benign, while the jittery shakycam technique heightens a feeling of nausea and disorientation that sets in early on. Time, space and mobility are signified by occasional shots of airplanes and birds flying in the sky, while the restricted and routine movements of the cows in the overcrowded milking parlour and cattle corral are caught in a state of inertia. Violated and abused for her milk, Luma is ultimately confined and tethered to a world to which she doesn't belong.

Cow won't be for everyone, but it's by no means a film that tells you what to make of it. It's a silent portrait of life in captivity that's radical in its simplicity as it soberly invites viewers to reckon with the feelings of a sentient, non-human other. Its observational mode keeps it from being didactic or manipulative in any way, and it adopts an intimacy that evokes the deepest empathy. Luma's pain is never spectacle. Of course, the politics of Arnold's films are never explored conventionally or explicitly. They lie in her sensory techniques, the murky counter-narratives and affective capacities of her marginalised subjects. It's not news to anyone that cows are commodities abused for profit, and you know from the get-go how Luma's story ends, but that doesn't make the ending any less impactful, and that feeling stays with you for a while. **MARINA ASHIOTI**

Cyrano

Directed by **JOE WRIGHT**
Starring **PETER DINKLAGE, HALEY BENNETT, BEN MENDELSOHN**
Released **14 JANUARY**

There are two kinds of character actors: those who are chameleons that disappear into each role; and those who tend to deliver a variation on well-liked schtick. Peter Dinklage, in *Cyrano*, distinguishes himself as the latter. This is not so much Peter Dinklage's *Cyrano* as it is Peter Dinklage in *Cyrano*. And that's no bad thing, for those who enjoy the wit and intelligence that Dinklage possesses, with some effective light brooding in between and absolutely no attempt at a French accent.

Joe Wright's *Cyrano* is adapted from a stage musical version of Edmond Rostand classic play, with music from The National and written by Dinklage's wife, Erica Schmidt. The plot stays largely true to the original text, with Cyrano believing himself too ugly to pursue Roxane (Haley Bennett), and instead helps Chrisitan (Kelvin Harrison Jr) win her heart by writing love letters for him. Their plan is thrown into disarray by the powerful De Guiche (Ben Mendelsohn) who also has sights set on this fair maiden. Only in this version Cyrano's oversized nose is swapped out for Dinklage's dwarfism, while De Guiche is promoted to Dukedom from the off and is more straightforwardly villainous. That proves a successful interpretation, and Mendelsohn chews the scenery with nightmarish aplomb, styled with grotesque makeup that makes him appear in the midst of decay.

Yet Mendelsohn's commitment to camp cannot compensate for some of the musical numbers where the orchestration is woefully thin. He and Dinklage have decent voices, but with such shallow instrumentals they are abandoned on screen. This is not the case for every number: a country music style lament by fearful soldiers is effective; as is a duet between Bennett and Dinklage. And Harrison Jr has such a rich, emotive voice that he can fill the room with it, but for the most part the audio cannot stand up to the visuals. And what visuals they are! It's hard to overstate the joy of being immersed in such a feast of bright matte pastels and exquisite costuming. The dance numbers are equally lovely, particularly a ballet number from a group of training cadets.

But some of the visuals are also the film's downfall. The age gap between Cyrano and Roxane appears to be around 30 years, and all allusions to his presence in her childhood and his eternal love for her have an unsettling predatory implication. And, while the casting seems to have been done with the best colourblind intentions, no one seems to have judged the significance of having a Black man playing the sweet, objectified dum dum who's willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good of white characters. It's an imperfect but enjoyable adaptation, with Wright, like Dinklage, delivering something charismatic but insubstantial.

LEILA LATIF

ANTICIPATION. 3
Hopefully lessons were learned from woeful The Woman in the Window.

ENJOYMENT. 4
Hard to not be swept up in something this beautiful.

IN RETROSPECT. 3
A fun lark, but hardly one for the ages.

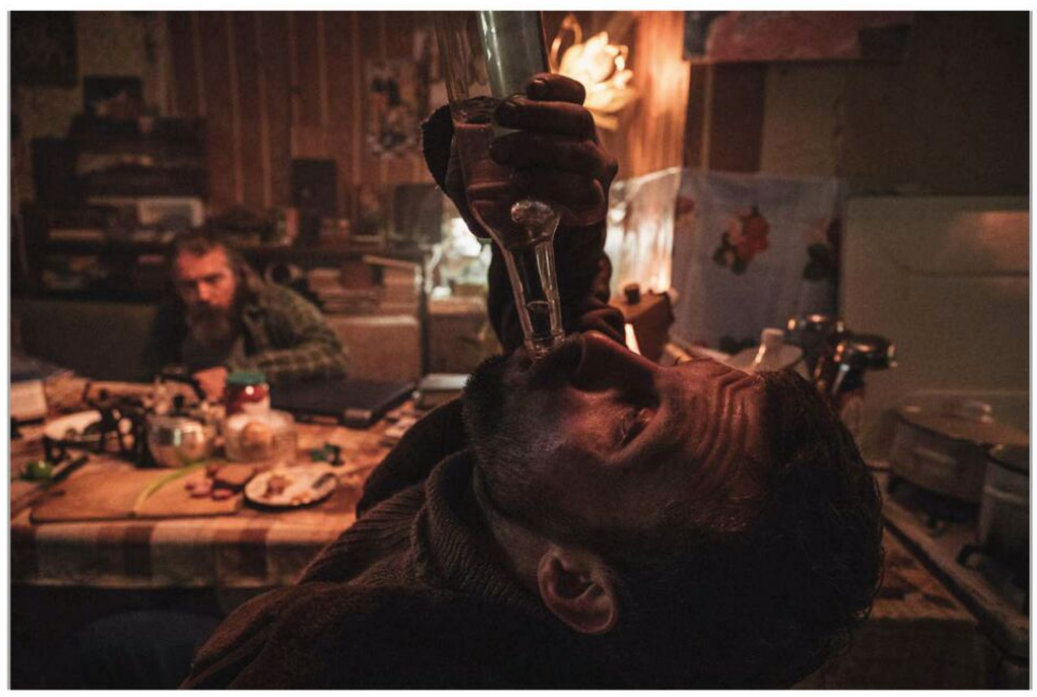
Petrov's Flu

Directed by	**KIRILL SEREBRENNIKOV**
Starring	**SEMYON SERZIN, CHULPAN KHAMATOVA, VLADISLAV SEMILETKOV**
Released	**11 FEBRUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
Latest from the recently-imprisoned Russian writer/director Kirill Serebrennikov.

ENJOYMENT.
A wild, on-the-fly experiment which largely succeeds where its predecessor, Leto, *failed.*

IN RETROSPECT.
A timely dirge into metaphorical pandemic-fuelled paranoia.



In 2018, Russian filmmaker Kirill Serebrennikov was under house arrest, facing almost certainly politically motivated embezzlement charges relating to his role as a director of a state-supported, state-critical Moscow theatre. Having been released from house arrest in 2019, he is still unable to leave Russia, but is at least doing interviews this time around – and praise be for that, since *Petrov's Flu*, which he shot at night while going to court during the day, is at once palpably visionary and abrasively obscure, an intensely expressive work which is also deeply embedded in a Russian context.

It is largely exhilarating, although I have no idea what it's about – it may actually be about Petrov's (Semyon Serzin) flu. The title character is introduced on a Yekaterinburg bus looking straight into the camera and coughing a raspy, hacking cough. (The film, an adaptation of a novel by Alexey Salnikov, was shot before the pandemic.) It's the end of the year, and Petrov and his ex-wife (Chulpan Khamatova) are monitoring their son's symptoms before he's set to attend a children's New Year's concert and costume party.

The narrative expands, virally, to other characters and other timelines, often through rambling long takes lensed by DoP Vladislav Opelyants, whose camera traverses multiple physical spaces and registers of reality in over the course of several single shots. *Leto*, a sort of true story about the Russian punk and post-punk scene, was likeable, with a nostalgic core and rock-n-roll energy, but frustratingly derivative in all its "freewheeling" filmmaking flourishes; there wasn't much in it to suggest that Serebrennikov had this much imaginative boldness and originality.

The first movement of the film is its most intense, with the invariably dark and grimy frame packed with virulently xenophobic and blind-drunk grotesques, and random acts of well-choreographed random acts of violence. When a brawl breaks out at a library's poetry reading, the overhead lights strobe on and off because someone's head is being bashed against the wall right where the light switch happens to be.

This is breathtaking filmmaking, but would be a little hard to take for two-and-a-half hours. Thankfully, Serebrennikov has more tricks up his sleeve. Saturated flashbacks in the style of narrow-gauge home movies take us back to Petrov's Soviet-era childhood and his own trip to a Christmas concert like the one his son attends; and handsome Leto-style black-and-white widescreen sequences show us the life of the marginal character who ends up playing the Snow Queen of Petrov's confused memories.

These scenes – and their juxtaposition – bring an unexpected tenderness and melancholy to what is essentially a literal fever dream about contemporary Russia in all its dark, outsized, incredulous glory, complete with a mangy-dog story about a resurrected corpse that threads throughout the film.

MARK ASCH

The Eyes of Tammy Faye

Directed by **MICHAEL SHOWALTER**
Starring **JESSICA CHASTAIN, ANDREW GARFIELD CHERRY JONES**
Released **4 FEBRUARY**

Disguised in pancake makeup of steadily increasing thickness, prosthetic jaw padding that makes her look like a country niece of GI Joe, and a Minnesotan warble retrospectively rendering *Fargo*'s accent work an exemplar of reined-in naturalism, Jessica Chastain holds little back in essaying televangelist Tammy Faye Messner. It's a performance of unrestrained muchness, though there's no overplaying a woman defined by an irrepressible pep that brought her success as a children's entertainer that turned her into an aspirational figure for some and an object of ridicule for others.

Chastain's portraiture moves to resolve that dissonance by starting with the childhood years and tracing Tammy Faye's psychological fault lines back to their source, namely, mommy issues. Growing up under an ascetic Pentecost (Cherry Jones) guarded in her affections created a hole in chipmunk-cheeked Tammy Faye, which she'd spend her whole life trying in vain to fill with the love of her eventual husband Jim Bakker (Andrew Garfield) and the extravagant wealth he'd bring her. Somewhere between realizing why her marriage wasn't working, striking up an almost-affair with another man, and developing one of those pill addictions that always seem to creep in around the second act of movies like this, she strayed from the light. The revelation that the Bakker media empire she'd been cut into was built on fraud put her in the crosshairs of newspaper headlines and late-night routines spliced into the dramatisation, but Chastain casts her in a more sympathetic light, one that verges on absolution.

As Tammy Faye's mother summarises in blunt made-for-the-trailer dialogue, her only sin was not greed or vanity, but a willingness to follow too blindly. From the film's slanted vantage, she was actually something of an inspiration, a go-getter gal making her way through a man's world with a smile and a song; in one particularly unsubtle moment, she drags a chair across a backyard cookout to give herself a literal seat at the table. In the implication that all this was Bakker's doing while Tammy Faye remained innocently oblivious – she didn't even know how much money she had, we learn – she's let off the hook a bit too easily.

Those disco-Christ tunes, by the way, have been sung by Chastain in one of the flashier aspects of an all-the-trimmings turn that betrays an award-hunger more often ascribed to Amy Adams. The montage set to her throaty rendition of 'Jesus Keeps Takin' Me Higher and Higher' hits the fever pitch of camp that the Platonic ideal of this film would've maintained for its entire run time. No matter what we might think of her, it's clear that Tammy Faye was one of a kind. Chastain's mannered plague of tics does right by her in that respect, but she's been inserted into a template now worn from overuse. **CHARLES BRAMESCO**

ANTICIPATION. 3
Jessica Chastain submits to a higher power.

ENJOYMENT. 4
That is certainly quite a lot of acting!

IN RETROSPECT. 3
Comes with a moral inventory that is too generously forgiving.

The Souvenir: Part II

WHITE LIES RECOMMENDS

Directed by	**JOANNA HOGG**
Starring	**HONOR SWINTON-BYRNE, RICHARD AYOADE, TILDA SWINTON**
Released	**4 FEBRUARY**

ANTICIPATION. 4

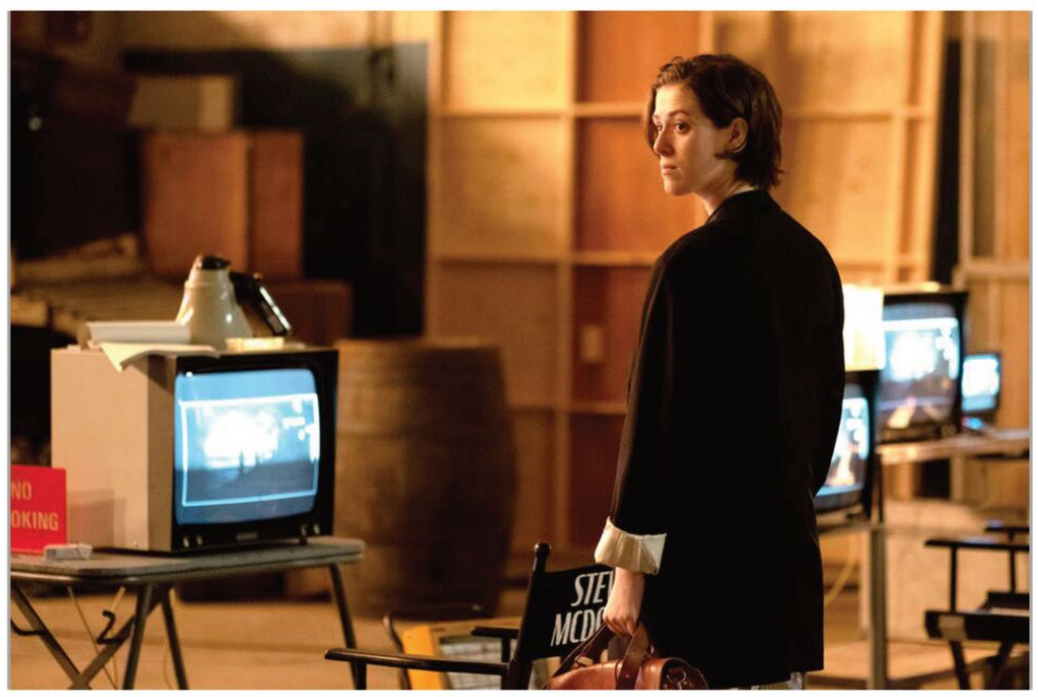
The Souvenir *was one of 2019's most remarkable films. Tentatively expecting major things here.*

ENJOYMENT. 5

Hogg's honesty and imagination make this sublime portrait of artistic failure and triumph.

IN RETROSPECT. 5

Distinctive and daring but with a vulnerable



"I want to show life as I imagine it; that's what cinema's all about," Julie Harte tells her skeptical film school instructors, who are expressing doubts about the script she's submitted as her thesis project. Her perception of art's purpose has altered drastically since she first enrolled at Raynham Film School with the ambition of documenting the working class in Tyneside.

But that's understandable – Julie isn't the girl she was back then, swept off her feet by a charming heroin addict who entered her life like a hurricane and left it with similarly devastating effect. If Joanna Hogg's *The Souvenir* was a film about the ebb and flow of a toxic relationship, its other half is about learning to rebuild.

The second part of her cine memoir sees several key players returning, notably Honor Swinton Byrne as Julie and Tilda Swinton as her doting mother Rosalind. Richard Ayoade – a scene-stealer in the dinner party sequence of the first film – also reprises his role as the acerbic filmmaker Patrick, while a trio of actors (Charlie Heaton, Harris Dickinson and Joe Alwyn) play the young men who drift in and out of Julie's life in the wake of her boyfriend Anthony's death.

The film picks up in the weeks following Anthony's overdose in the toilets of London's Wallace Collection. "I hope you're going to stay here for a long time, as long as possible darling," Julie's mother tells her softly as she retreats to her childhood home and the safety of her parents' gentle embrace. It's a rare depiction of a familial relationship not beset by turmoil, but soon enough she has to return to London and the ghosts that live in the apartment she once shared with Anthony.

His absence looms large as Julie attempts to make sense of her grief, reconciling the man she loved with the reality of his addiction and untimely demise. It's an uncomfortable, inevitable position, but Julie displays a drive and determination previously absent as she drifted through life, coasting on her privilege. There are still moments that highlight her good fortune, yet she doesn't take it for granted now she understands the fragility that surrounds her.

Julie attempts to understand her loss through the recreation of images recognisable from *The Souvenir*, synthesising grief with the heavy-handed approach of a student, but when she eventually finds her way, the results are breathtaking; a late sequence is a trick mirror of sound and images, drawing from the past to make sense of the present. If *The Souvenir: Part II* is Hogg's most personal film, it is also her most ambitious, straddling genre and form to present a story about grief but not necessarily about grieving. Questions of what compels us to make art – and what purpose art should serve – linger after the credits roll. It's a beguiling work from a master of her craft that holds the art of filmmaking in its piercing gaze, and speaks to an uncompromising vision of what cinema can be with a little faith and imagination.

HANNAH STRONG

Amulet

Directed by	**ROMOLA GARAI**
Starring	**ALEC SECAREANU, CARLA JURI, IMELDA STAUNTON**
Released	**28 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
Romola Garai is back to test her directing mettle after a fantastic early short.

ENJOYMENT.
Commendably weird, and completely committed to that weirdness.

IN RETROSPECT.
Perhaps doesn't all come out in the wash, but it's certainly a singular, substance-rich

Way back in 2012, the actor Romola Garai made a startling and accomplished short film called *Scrubber*, and it suggested she had a viable career both in front of and behind the camera. Then, all went quiet for close to a decade, until it was announced that her debut feature, *Amulet*, would premiere at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. Was this the film that would capitalise and expand on the immense promise of *Scrubber*? Yes... and no. It's actually a very different cinematic prospect: a wildly ambitious, idiosyncratic and very English domestic horror story baked in the mould of Clive Barker's seminal S&M gore wig-out, *Hellraiser*, from 1987. It's also a story interested in exploring the chasm of understanding between male and female experience when it comes to matters of the body.

Amulet initially sets its stall as a piece of bleak, wintery social realism as frazzled border guard Tomaz (Alec Secareanu) is shown to have fled from an unnamed, vaguely Easten European civil war to the UK. The now customary intolerance of refugees leaves our hero bruised and penniless, and suddenly at the beck and call of Imelda Staunton's Sister Claire who decides to give him bed and board, but essentially accepts his autonomy as payment. This accounts for about the opening 15 minutes of the film, and it feels as if the pieces are being shifted into the attack formation for a ghoulish survival horror with some fairly transparent political trappings. Yet Garai refuses to take the obvious route, instead tinkering with the context, and picking up on strange threads which lead into a world of high gothic fantasy.

Tomaz's dire personal situation ends up being less of a signal as to which way things are headed, as there's deeper interest in the fact that he is a man and he is expected to cleave to the traditional image of the patriarchy. Also, he should protect the woman with whom he is in love. The woman in question is Carla Juri's emotionally fragile Magda who also lives in the house and is burdened with the sole task of caring for her sick mother slumped in the attic. With direct experience of the trauma of war, Tomaz feels as if he can easily lend a hand, and that's where things go a little off the rails.

Not everything in the film is completely logical, and there are a few late-game plot jerks where the intensity of the images on screen don't quite match the perceived psychologies of the characters. Yet this is at the expense of Garai landing a fervent broadside against both female oppression – from men, from mothers, from supposed social superiors – and the general apathy extended towards the lives of those who tend to perch on the lower rungs of life. What's more, the satisfying descent into SFX freak-out allies *Amulet* to a strain of horror in which the pure pleasure of grotesque viscera is sometimes enough to trump a more conventional and plainly stated denouement. In all, here's hoping that it's not another decade before Garai is writing and directing again.

DAVID JENKINS

Interview by **KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN** *Illustration by* **RAYA DEUSSEN**

Romola Garai

The actor-turned-writer/director on #MeToo, upturning genre tropes, and her haunting feminist horror feature, Amulet.

Actor, and now writer-director Romola Garai has worked with the likes of Sarah Gavron, François Ozon and most recently Lucile Hadzihalilovic over the course of her prolific career. Following her 2012 short film, *Scrubber*, Garai made a splash at Sundance and Sitges in 2021 with debut feature and daring feminist revenge horror *Amulet*, starring Carla Juri, Alec Secareanu, Angeliki Papoulia and Imelda Staunton.

LWLies: For *Amulet*, you've created a matriarchal religion which is displayed in striking ways with practical effects. How did you came up with the goddess and creature designs? It reminded me of *Hellraiser*. Garai: I saw and loved *The Dark Crystal* at a very young age, so it was imperative that the creature was SFX. I didn't want a visual effect – though we did add some in post – but it was important to me that the creature existed in that tradition. It definitely has that sense of *Hellraiser* too, and the designer did a great job of making it horrible and disgusting. The goddess is all prosthetics and a woman in a suit. I wanted the suit to be shaped like a uterus, so they made a physical suit which had these attached fallopian-like tubes. With the background of that scene, I wanted it to feel like you'd entered the inside of a woman's body.

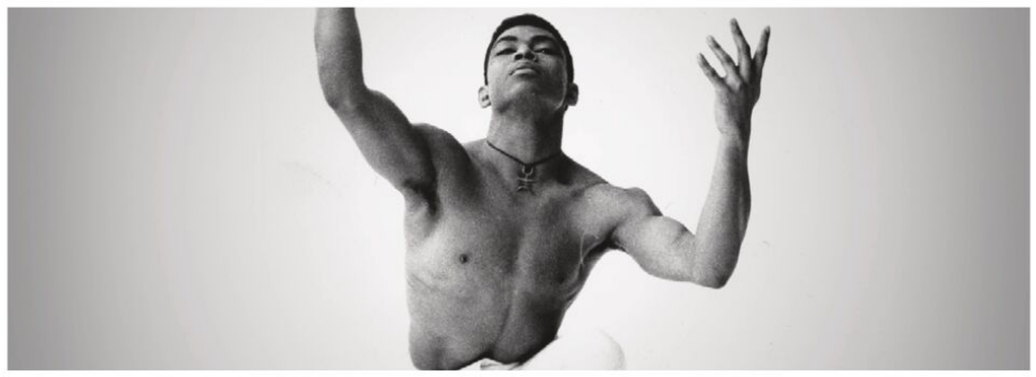
You toy with supernatural horror tropes, especially the terrifying old woman. Why do you think that image is used so much in horror? It's very useful for society to be afraid of older women. At the stage where a woman realises that society is a crock of shit and the odds are stacked against her she becomes very dangerous to the status quo. I still see that trope again and again, and I wish I could say that cinema is going through some sort of revolution but I'm not really sure it is.

When writing the screenplay did toying with tropes and flouting convention come into play? Being an actor really influences the way that you write, because I have felt very restricted by the kind of conventions around how female characters are presented. I was interested in how those characterisations end up influencing women in the way that they behave in their own lives. When I had the opportunity to write a film within the horror space, the first thing I thought about was, 'Who is the victim?' You always have to have a source of evil and you have the victim of evil. I ended up trying to position the women in such a way that they weren't either of those things.

In French extreme and horror cinema, directors like Claire Denis and Catherine Breillat have used the body to interrogate desire, violence and social constructs. You do something similar in *Amulet*. With those French films, they are influential because there's an understanding in them that the female experience is an innately violent one. I know it's an idea that doesn't connect with all women because I've had conversations about it, but it's one that really connects with me.

In the film, ex-soldier Tomaz is shown reading 'On Violence' by Hannah Arendt, which ties into the film's themes of conflict. I was reading a book about the manhunt for Slobodan Milošević. That book had a lot in it on the subject of 'How do you close a civil war, and at what cost?' To a large extent they were asking a lot of women who were raped in that country to just move on for the greater good. At the same time, I was trying to research a script about the early Christians, so I was really interested in this pre-patriarchal version of Christianity that had embraced a lot more women. Something that really stuck in my head was the Catholic idea of forgiveness becoming a central part of the religions and an important thing to the patriarchy. It was able essentially to instigate this tightly misogynistic structure by placing huge psychological pressure on women to be forgiving.

You've spoken publicly about your experience with Harvey Weinstein and support for the #MeToo movement. Did any of your anger about the film industry filter into *Amulet*? Carla [Juri] immediately latched on to the rage of the film, and she was right, I was really angry. I was pretty annoyed about the way a lot of the industry is set up and what that does to women on a physical level. *Amulet* is supposed to be darkly funny in places too particularly in the way I deal with childbirth as punishment



Ailey

Directed by **JAMILA WIGNOT**
Released **7 JANUARY**

As much as celebrating Black joy, community and resistance, Alvin Ailey's choreography embodied the depths of collective grief, relocating protest from the streets to the stage. Afflicted with mental illness and sentenced to the lonely space of creation, Ailey's ambition was as tenacious as it was all-consuming, and as a result of homophobia, he became an increasingly isolated figure. This struggle to find intimacy guides Jamila Wignot's documentary, who carefully contextualises his secretive nature against a repressive historical backdrop.

Annukka Lilja's artful editing melds vintage black-and-white footage and audio recordings to mesmerising effect. Through a treasure trove of previously undiscovered audio recordings, Ailey's personal input – which he recounts with unparalleled tenderness – is weaved into a narrative of biography, performance and social history. His narration exudes a lyricism that matches his fluid vocabulary of movement, which revolutionised the landscape of contemporary dance. Perhaps in a formal attempt to emulate Ailey's fluid body of work, the timeline becomes muddled, with some sequences struggling to keep viewers oriented in time. To its credit, the film is faced with the impossible task of understanding a notoriously closed-off subject, and has no qualms in making transparent its frustration in its inability to probe deeper. **MARINA ASHIOTI**

ANTICIPATION.
Eager to be immersed in this Sundance-acclaimed portrait of a groundbreaking choreographer. **4**

ENJOYMENT.
Quite incongruous for a documentary on dance to commit so heavily to static talking heads. **3**

IN RETROSPECT.
Poeticism ebbs and flows through Wignot's impressonistic mediation, fluctuating in parts. **3**

Mass

Directed by **FRAN KRANZ**
Starring **ANN DOWD, JASON ISAACS, MARTHA PLIMPTON**
Released **20 JANUARY**

In November 2019, CNN reported that there had been 45 school shootings in 46 weeks in the United States. This horrifying statistic demonstrated an epidemic that is difficult to comprehend, and various filmmakers have explored this controversial topic, but Fran Kranz's directorial debut (which he also wrote) takes a different approach.

In a quiet, carefully-prepared room in a church basement, two sets of parents meet for the first time. Richard (Reed Birney) and Linda (Ann Dowd) have been invited by Jay (Jason Isaacs) and Gail (Martha Plimpton) at the behest of their therapist. Years after a tragedy perpetrated by Richard and Linda's son, it seems a meeting might provide some sort of closure – but it also means revisiting the painful event after years of court-directed fallout.

The performances, particularly by Plimpton, Dowd and Isaacs, are extraordinary, and Kranz's direction is interesting in its stark simplicity. As a portrait of familial grief, *Mass* underlines the senselessness of its subject matter without coming across as a political screed (even though as a viewer you do start to ask how anyone can see this kind of violence occurring and not want to do something about it). Mass violence can all-too-often be reduced to statistics, but there's a very real human cost which should always be the focus of these conversations. Kranz's thoughtful film is a beautifully-judged and tender work that attempts to reckon with the unthinkable. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION.
This topic has been well-covered in contemporary cinema with varying results. **3**

ENJOYMENT.
Kranz takes a quiet, considered approach, which pays dividends. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
A haunting look at human tragedy, powered by a remarkable ensemble cast. **4**

La Mif

Directed by **FRED BAILLIF**
Starring **CLAUDIA GROB, AMÉLIE TONSI, ANAÏS ULDRY**
Released **25 FEBRUARY**

Sarah Gavron's *Rocks* had neglected teenage girls telling a gritty but optimistic tale of a makeshift family. Fred Baillif's similarly-styled *La Mif* initially appears to be its Swiss counterpart, yet slowly reveals itself as a far bleaker affair. The film , which is slang for family ("The Fam"), is set in a residential care home for teenagers, one that authorities have to be reminded is "not a prison". Those who live there attempt to find sanctuary and community with one another, but an incident which breaks the laws around teenage consent triggers a chain reaction that widen the cracks in the system.

Where *La Mif* works best is in the moments of reflection between girls talking about how they ended up where they are, confessing what they feel ashamed of and trying to manufacture the familial intimacy they crave. The path to residential care isn't a happy one, but to see childhood brutality laid out so nonchalantly makes for almost unbearable viewing. The residual trauma the young actresses are able to portray, which manifests in myriad ways, is powerful in its understatement. Where the film overplays its hand is trying to connect these stories to the administrators, social workers and larger crises within the care system. Those tangents feel at best superfluous and at worst, white saviourism. There is a lack of catharsis in the conclusion which, to the film's credit, feels apt. It's a powerful story with no easy way forward for anyone concerned. **LEILA LATIF**

ANTICIPATION.
Rocks *in French? Yep, we'll bite.* **3**

ENJOYMENT.
Well-made but a highly unenjoyable subject matter. **3**

IN RETROSPECT.
Understated and powerful filmmaking from Fred Bailiff. **4**

The Duke

Directed by **ROGER MICHELL**
Starring **JIM BROADBENT, HELEN MIRREN, FIONN WHITEHEAD**
Released **25 FEBRUARY**

As Joni Mitchell sang in 'Big Yellow Taxi' , "You don't know what you've got till it's gone." In retrospect it's almost as if she was singing specifically about the tragically curtailed career of British filmmaker Roger Michell, who passed at the age of 65 in September 2021. With films such as *Notting Hill*, *The Mother*, *Venus* and *Le Week-End* under his belt, he was a purveyor of lively, premium-edged dramas that always aimed for widespread appeal. The tragedy of his death is compounded by the fact that his swansong, *The Duke*, is also one of his most lively, resonant and well-rounded works, a cheeky, Ealing-esque farce in which ultra-loquacious Geordie odd-jobber Kempton Bunton (Jim Broadbent), sets about stealing the eponymous Goya from the National Gallery with a plan to ransom it back to the government.

The film comes with the blue-collar bustle of a Roddy Doyle novel, as Kempton's long-suffering wife Dorothy (Helen Mirren), attempts to stifle his various crackpot schemes (all in the name of funding TV licences for pensioners). Some may read the film as a righetous anti-government screed, others may see it as a whimsical true tale, but Michell treats the material with ample delicacy so that, in the end, you can take from the film what you want. A jolly throwback to a time when flip, breezy British comedies came freighted with substance, and lots of charismatic performances to boot. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION.
The film that ended up being Brit stalwart Roger Michell's parting gesture. **3**

ENJOYMENT.
Just a whole lot of fun while you're watching. Broadbent and Mirren are a perfect match. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
Funny, silly and just a damn good time at the pictures. **3**

They call him "THE MECHANIC"
He has 100 ways to kill... *and they all work!*

CHARLES BRONSON

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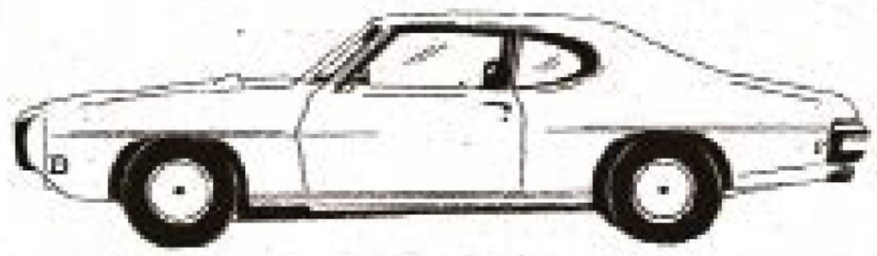

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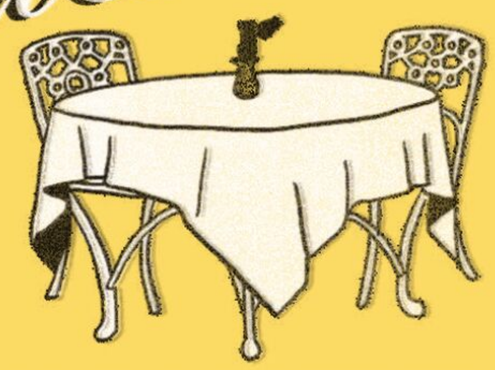

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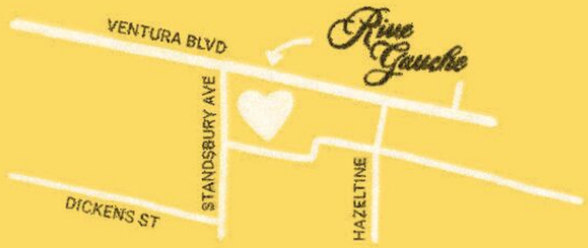

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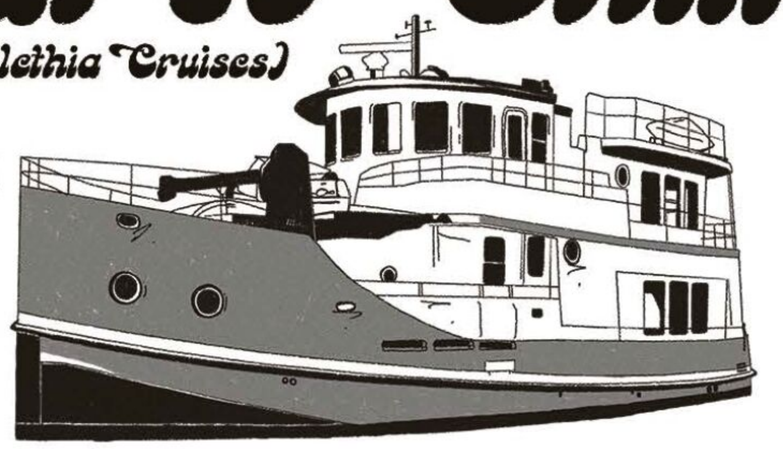

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Parallel Mothers

Directed by **PEDRO ALMODÓVAR**
Starring **PENÉLOPE CRUZ, MILENA SMIT, ISRAEL ELEJALDE**
Released **28 JANUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
Following Julieta *and* Pain & Glory*, Almodóvar is on a major roll.*
5

ENJOYMENT.
Lands emotional body blow after emotional body blow. Penélope Cruz is immense.
5

IN RETROSPECT.
Right up there in the ranks of the director's finest work.
5

Pedro Almodóvar's sensual melodrama of identity, maternity and sexuality plays like a remix of 2006's *Volver* cross-processed through 1999's *All About My Mother* and even 2002's *Talk To Her* – so that's all of his best films in a single package. And forget boxes: most will require a flat-bed truck stacked with Kleenex to make it through this one without the irritant of tear-based obfuscation. This is a film about coping with the trauma of death, but also the difficulties of comprehending how others create their own mechanisms to deal with that same trauma. There are moments of unimaginable sadness which segue smoothly into brightness and levity. Life is presented as a collection of small disappointments and modest victories, with acceptance and forward momentum key not only to how the characters evolve but how this surprising tale unravels. It's also rare to see death discussed with such lyricism and circumspection. Every shot, every narrative beat, every decision exudes not merely confidence, but the touch of a master.

As director-star pairings go, there's very little that beats an Almodóvar/Penélope Cruz effort, and this latest appears to prove that the beloved Spanish leading lady saves all of her A-material for Pedro. And why wouldn't you? Here she plays Janis (named after tragic hippy rebel Janis Joplin), a magazine photographer who is interested in disinterring the unmarked grave of her grandfather who was executed by Falangists during the Franco regime. When she is one day asked to make a portrait of celebrity archeologist Arturo (Israel Elejalde), she solicits his help, and the pair also embark on an affair.

Their tryst is short lived as he has to tend to his ailing wife, but it produces a child that Janis – in the spirit of her pioneering grandmother – decides to bring up alone. While on the maternity ward she meets Ana (Milena Smit), a troubled teen carrying a baby whose father is unknown. The pair strike up a bond when their children are born simultaneously. Their complex future entanglements comprise the bulk of the plot, and Janis is forced to make a series of heart-wrenching decisions in order to reconcile her love for her child, and her dedication to stalwart feminist independence and survival at all costs.

As with 2019's autobiographical *Pain & Glory*, this one confines much of the drama to Janis's bijou Madrid flat, in which every shot heaves with background literary references, suggestive art pieces and fabulously gaudy colour combinations. Almodóvar has for many decades been characterised – and lauded – for his empathy towards the struggles of women at the hands of tyrannical men, and *Parallel Mothers* both doubles down and subtly expands on that remit. Janis is the epitome of a Strong Female Lead, but she comes with baggage, texture and even shades of moral duplicity that snags her away from the realms of the clichéd. And that's largely down to Cruz's extraordinary performance, in which she doles out magnificently effective emotional body blows at a rate of knots, while never once appearing like she's breaking a sweat. **DAVID JENKINS**

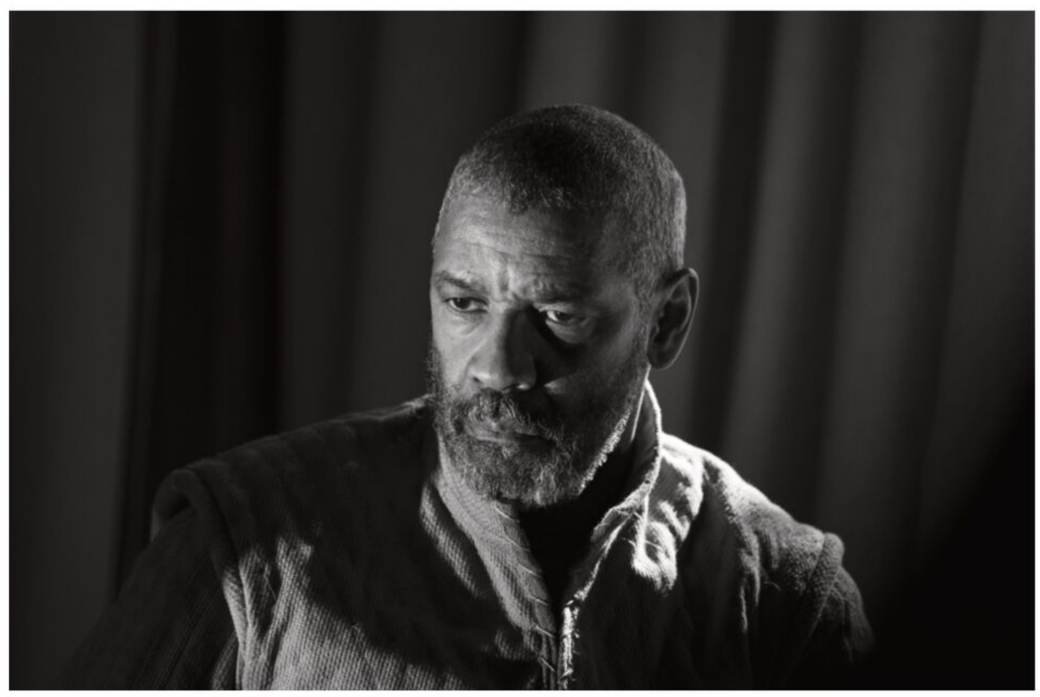
The Tragedy of Macbeth

Directed by	**JOEL COEN**
Starring	**DENZEL WASHINGTON, FRANCES MCDORMAND, KATHRYN HUNTER**
Released	**26 DECEMBER**

ANTICIPATION.
Something Coen this way comes. **5**

ENJOYMENT.
An innovative take on the Bard with an eye to tradition. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
Hail Denzel, Thane of Acting. **4**



Homage has always been the lingua franca of the Coen brothers, and though Joel and Ethan have parted ways with prospects of another joint feature looking dim, that much hasn't changed. Their films append scare quotes to hidebound American genres like the western, screwball comedy, noir, or musical, a practice that Joel applies to the concept of the filmed play through less overt and less ironic means in his solo directorial debut.

His magnificently mounted *The Tragedy of Macbeth* finds a fresh angle on an English 101 staple by peering into the past for aesthetic cues and tapping into its lineage of gorgeous artifice. The stark black-and-white photography and boxy Academy ratio foster an aura of the old world. Not the medieval era in which Macbeth (Denzel Washington, at the height of his powers) jockeyed for the throne of Scotland, however, instead transporting us to the first half of the 20th century, when the membrane between Tinseltown and the most highbrow halls of Broadway was more porous and permissive. Coen eschewed location shooting for breathtaking soundstage sets in order to simulate the rawness of the theatre without getting hemmed in by the shape of the proscenium.

While his script remains faithful to the text, Frances McDormand finds new shades of defiance in Lady Macbeth and Kathryn Hunter's gurgling interpretation of the Weird Sisters suggests that Gollum might be their brother. In a role done so many times that its dialogue has begun to sound like incantation, Washington reinvigorates the apprehension and eventual power-hunger of Big Mac with unexpected readings, underplaying big moments and loosing his full gravitas in quieter scenes. He practically tosses off the "tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy, and it works because by that point, he's already demonstrated how much he's holding in.

The creative departures come through in the spartan sets and how cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel shoots them. Indoors, Coen gives his cast little more to work with than walls and large stone blocks swathed in frame-whitening fog. When paired with a story so settled in centuries of enshrinement, the meticulousness of Coen's craft can sometimes slip into formalism for its own sake, as if Shakespeare's words function as scaffolding on which to hang the painterly compositions. During what we may have to sadly refer to as the "brothers era," their typical project would be packed with commentary, symbolism, and philosophical tangents. However elevated by style, this one is what it is, its narrative self-evident and unaltered.

Even if the dry wit and cherrypickable allusions may be absent, the technical virtuosity on display marks this as the work of a master. Visceral, haunted, and severe, Coen's vision coaxes out not just the intensity in the play — every "gritty" take has done this, from Roman Polanski to Justin Kurzel — but in its older renderings. Newly single, he's in the process of rediscovering what it means to make a film his own. That won't stop him from making 'em like they used to. **CHARLES BRAMESCO**

Interviews by **ADAM WOODWARD** *Illustration by* **RAYA DEUSSEN**

How We Made *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

Joel Coen and his team relay the secrets of breathing new life into one of the most hallowed texts in all of history, 'Macbeth'.

For his first solo mission away from his brother and creative partner in crime, Ethan, Joel Coen has decided to offer up his version of the most scared text in the history of drama: Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'. This expressionist monochrome fever dream has Denzel Washington as the Thane of Cawdor and Frances McDormand as his violently manipulative other half. Here, Coen and a clutch of below-the-line collaborators explain how they were able to pump new blood into this canoncical tale.

INTERVIEWEES

JOEL COEN *WRITER/DIRECTOR*	JC
BRUNO DELBONNEL *CINEMATOGRAPHER*	BD
STEFAN DECHANT *PRODUCTION DESIGNER*	SD
MARY ZOPHRES *COSTUME DESIGNER*	MZ

JOEL COEN I'm not a Shakespeare guy. I've seen lots of Shakespeare over the years. I've seen lots of productions of 'Macbeth'. I've read a lot of Shakespeare, but it's not really my background. One of the most interesting things about *The Tragedy of Macbeth* was the idea of taking a very deep dive into a particular work. I spent a lot of time with friends of mine who do know a lot about Shakespeare, asking them about the production history of the play and all the productions that were done on film. I was interested to see in what ways the play had been edited, because the ambition of this particular project was really to give it a rhythm and a pace that was very, very relentless. You can really get into the weeds on all of this stuff.

STEFAN DECHANT From the beginning we talked about wanting the imagery to be very abstract. We discussed what German Expressionism had meant for filmmaking, and how it influenced people like Charles Laughton when he was making *The Night of the Hunter*. We looked at Carl Dreyer and FW Murnau, and we also looked at Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs of architecture, and Casa Luis Barragán in Mexico, which is just two slab walls and a square tower. Joel was immediately saying 'I think that could be Inverness'. That then led us onto a conversation about a 20th century theatre designer named Edward Gordon Craig, who created these very abstract, geometric designs. That was just our first conversation.

JC I saw the Orson Welles version and I think it's a very interesting movie but it was a very stressful movie for him. He was trying to prove that he could make the movie on schedule and budget, 'cause he had this reputation, and so there are things in it that are fast and sloppy. I think it's one of the most bizarre exercises in costume design I've ever seen; he does some very weird things in terms of combining and editing and

inventing new characters. So in terms of influences or inspirations for this film, there's a little James Turrell in there – although not really consciously – and some Sugimoto. We looked at a lot of Dreyer, and Murnau's *Sunrise*; not so much the Germanic stuff, more the exteriors, the fields and the swamp.

BRUNO DELBONNEL Dreyer was the main influence, for me at least. It's about the simplicity of the set. What is so amazing about *The Passion of Joan of Arc* is the way he frames everything. Dreyer simplifies everything to show how powerful the English Church was against Joan of Arc. She has lost, basically. She has lost the battle against the Church. And the close-ups are extraordinary. That pushed us towards the Academy ratio, especially with the very powerful cast we had. The first close-up we did on Denzel Washington was just like, 'Wow, *that's* power!'

"There are a lot of romantic relationships in Shakespeare plays, but 'Macbeth' is the only good marriage. Okay, they have to be plotting a murder, but it's a good marriage."

JOEL COEN

JC A motivation for making this film was imagining the play with older protagonists than you usually see. Also, there are a lot of romantic relationships in Shakespeare plays, but 'Macbeth' is the only good marriage. Okay, they have to be plotting a murder, but it's a good marriage. Putting it in that context was interesting, and that's really why I wanted to work with Fran and Denzel. I just hadn't seen it quite talked about in that way before. It was a reflexive interest, too, because if I was going to do it with Fran, and Fran was interested in doing it, it was going to be about all the characters. She is old, just like I'm old, and because I'm old and she's old and she wanted to do it, it then became about that. Time, immortality, those are themes that appear in other movies that I've done with Ethan in the past, but they're also a huge part of 'Macbeth'. Shakespeare uses the word 'time' maybe 40 or 50 times. It's the obsession of the play. So I was interested in that aspect of the central relationships, and the pulp noir aspects of the story.

MARY ZOPHRES I've done one other black-and-white film before [*The Man Who Wasn't There*] and learned quite a lot from that. The most important thing is texture: how certain materials react differently in black-and-white as opposed to colour. Another thing I learned was that using lots of different medium tones can create depth in a good way. If you have a crowd of people and you use different shades, it adds more dimension. Before we made a single garment, we realised that it would be better if everything was sort of easy on the eye. In other words, I wasn't going to use a magenta or a purple on the thanes or some of the soldiers. Once we came up with a set of rules for what the characters were going to wear, that became the template for the rest of the movie.

BD We shot in colour, which was then converted to black-and-white, but all the sets were black-and-white. I asked for the set to be painted a certain type of grey, and the same with the costumes – the wigs and everything – so that I could balance the skin tones of the actors against the set and costume designs. The sets have almost no texture, so the idea was to give more presence to the actors through their costumes. We worked out the blocking and the framing of every scene two months before we started building the sets. So for a very simple scene like when Lady Macbeth burns the letter and then goes onto the balcony and lets it go, we knew how we were going to block it, the exact movement and perspective we wanted, so we designed that room and the balcony around that.

SD After our first meeting, I said to Joel that the best way to design this movie is digitally, using 3D models. That allowed us to move very fast. We were able to lay out all the sets and start thinking about how they would be lit. Very early on we started getting into these sets from a digital point of view, and we started applying shadows and grading the walls so they would fade into darkness. The castle was designed to be a cauldron of madness.

MZ Joel wanted the movie to look old, but we never had a specific time period in mind. We also decided it should have an organic feel to it. That's how we ended up landing on leather being the material of the armour. Then it was a case of trying to give it more depth. So we came up with this idea of lattice work – we used a warp and weft technique, almost like how they would have made cloth in medieval times. The under armour for Macbeth and the other soldiers is made out of a very textured linen cotton, which we quilted in vertical channels and tufted in a diamond shape. The idea of geometric shapes became important very early on.

"The movies that I made with Ethan, it was impossible for us not to be very specific about the location and the landscape. The ambition of Macbeth *was a little bit the opposite of that."*

JOEL COEN

JC The movies that I made with Ethan, it was impossible for us not to be very specific about the location and the landscape. The ambition of *Macbeth* was a little bit the opposite of that: It's not 12th-century Scotland but some generic past where these things could happen. It wasn't about having any real fidelity or defining the time period or the location in a concrete way. That was a strange exercise for me because it was so different from the way I usually think. But in the context of the play it made sense and it made it less difficult. We were trying to make a play as a movie, as opposed to a movie movie. In theatre, everything is abstract. If you have a room and there's a piece of furniture on a stage, it can be anything so long as it represents how the room is supposed to be furnished.

SD To go back to *The Night of the Hunter*, look at the scene where Robert Mitchum is standing out by the light post and the kids are in their bedroom – the graphic of the mountains behind them is so simple. It makes no pretense about being artifice. That's where we wanted to get to with this movie, to have no pretence about the artifice of it. For me it was about reducing the imagery to its simplest form, to the point of near-complete abstraction.

BD We also talked a lot about haikus, where three phrases describe the whole world. We took everything right back to basics. What is a room? A room is four walls. How many windows does it have? One? No windows? A corridor is a corridor – it's just that. When it came to blocking the actors, we thought a lot about creating rhythm with light. For example, when Macbeth delivers his "Is this a dagger which I see before me?" soliloquy, the rhythm of the light and shadow supports his movement and his words. It's like music, in a sense.

MZ I've worked with Fran before so I knew what worked on her. There were some processes of elimination but we came up with this shape that we thought would work on her. We did something similar with Denzel, creating an inverted triangle shape to give him broad shoulders and a nipped waist. For the shape of Fran's cape, Elsa Schiaparelli was someone I looked at. We wanted something that felt timeless and looked good in silhouette.

JC Editing the original text was an interesting process. I wanted the language to be there, I didn't wanna dumb the play down, but in all of Shakespeare there's this beautiful poetry and then there's a lot of embroidery in the poetry. Sometimes the embroidery is the most beautiful thing, but modern audiences who aren't used to listening to Shakespeare can get lost trying to decipher archaic parts of the language. So that's pretty much what went out. I wanted to make the movie not just for people who knew the play well, but for people who'd never seen a Shakespeare play. Period

Flee

Directed by **JONAS POHER RASMUSSEN**
Released **11 FEBRUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
There's promise of an empathetic character study told in untraditional terms. **3**

ENJOYMENT.
And it delivers: formally bold and emotionally rich. **4**

IN RETROSPECT.
Much to say about politics, sexuality, family, hope. This should be taught in schools. **4**

How do you define "home"? Is it a place, a person, a feeling, or all of those things and none at the same time? The complex, still somewhat unanswered question gives *Flee* its emotional tether – a handsome and bold portrait of a young, gay Afghan man telling his story for the first time. It's the new feature from Danish documentary filmmaker Jonas Poher Rasmussen, an almost entirely animated doc interviewing his longtime friend Amin Nawabi (using a pseudonym to protect his identity) about the journey that got him here – escaping Afghanistan in the late 1980s, losing track of his family and slowly finding himself in amid and against a fabricated narrative fed to him by human traffickers.

Animation at once lets Amin keep his privacy while allowing Rasmussen to elevate his story, which, when speaking about people who have been forced to flee their home countries in dire and unjust circumstances, too often reduced to numbers and statistics. A lesser filmmaker would have labelled this another "refugee story" and shoved it in a bleak little box.

We get to know Amin through all the facets of his life that matter – the headlines that made him leave Afghanistan and end up in Denmark (where he met Rasmussen as a teen) but also his experience coming of age as a gay man trying so desperately not to disappoint his family, an anchor in an otherwise unstable world. The best coming-of-age stories listen to the complex feelings wrapped up in those landmark moments, in which tiny details hold just as much weight as major events. The glee of discovering A-ha's 'Take on Me' as a kid, the way you look at your partner as he cooks you dinner in your tiny, temporary home. In *Flee* there isn't ,merely trauma or joy – there's anticipation, concern, guilt and hope too.

Rasmussen brings this to life visually with warmth and care. Faces are given permission to feel deeply, with inky blacks underlining sincere expressions while soft, sweeping palettes of earthy shades colour the countries usually glossed over in favour of slicing, clinical words. In the turbulent moments of Amin's life, the chameleonic design also adapts as breathtaking sulphurous lines swarm the screen as if closing in on this young man's mind. What matters is how he saw and felt it, as opposed to what the rest of the world would like to say about it.

Balance is everything, though – this isn't a saccharine rewriting of history, nor a fully-fledged "fuck you" to those who deserve it. Both Rasmussen and Amin remain aware of tone, opening up about how hard it can be to trust people when your life is spent being "adjusted, retained and suppressed" to fit an image others have created for you. Flashes of real-world footage (of protests and news bulletins, but also the trees of an empty garden swaying in the wind) ground *Flee* in something authentic and raw – vulnerable, even. More than anything, it's all in Amin's voice. In the cracks, the sighs, the occasional chuckle as he chokes up and remembers everything nobody had ever truly asked him to protect before. His story is one in a million, this film a rare gift finally doing it justice. **ELLA KEMP**

Lingui, the Sacred Bonds

Directed by **MAHAMAT SALEH HAROUN**
Starring **ACHOUACKH ABAKAR SOULEYMANE, RIHANE KHALIL ALIO, YOUSSOUF DJAORO**
Released **4 FEBRUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
The film has been doing the festival rounds since its premiere in Cannes.

ENJOYMENT.
Breathtaking visuals and deeply moving story and performances.

IN RETROSPECT.
One of the best films of the year – astonishingly realised and lingers with you long after.

Lingui is the Chadian word for 'Sacred Bonds', and in director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's taut and poetic feature, questions of who and what we are indebted to are both challenged and reaffirmed. Single mother Amina (Achouackh Abakar Souleymane) is withdrawn from her devout Muslim community, choosing to lead a discrete life with her 15-year-old daughter Maria (Rihane Khalil Alio), who she puts through school by arduously fashioning wire stoves from discarded tyres. When Maria becomes pregnant, claiming not to know how it happened, she is expelled from school and defiantly refuses to lead the same life as her mother, who was discarded by her family as she too became pregnant as a teen. Going against cultural and political norms, Maria demands an abortion.

Lingui could be considered subversive in terms of what UK audiences expect of films about or from central Africa. Telling Amina and Maria's story well is a principally feminist undertaking that Haroun handles with expert delicacy. By treating their story not as the type of politically-charged abortion drama we see commonly in the West, but as a mother's quest to redeem her life by helping her daughter, Haroun stiches us into Amina's shoes, and we share in her desperation and tenacity.

During the film's 87-minute runtime we come to understand Amina's unwavering conviction through extreme close-ups. Haroun allows ample breathing room to absorb Souleymane's strong and subtle performance, while moments of solitude – dancing, or smoking, or working – encourage us to witness Amina's transformation into the mother she needed at her daughters age. As the narrative advances and Amina has all-but-exhausted the options available to obtain an abortion for Maria, her estranged, monied sister Fanta shows up unexpectedly. Desperate to prevent her own daughter from an FGM procedure that her husband insists on, Fanta and Amina become co-conspirators, and the importance of whisper networks between women rise to the foreground. But any jubilation is in secret, as the women collude for better lives covered by the hum of street markets and city traffic, obtaining their procedures behind closed doors and in eerie silence.

A sequence towards the end of the film, where Amina and Maria try to find their way out of the narrow, maze-like backstreets in their neighbourhood, makes for a compelling horror sequences. The claustrophobic alleyways, with their high walls and false exits – mirror their journey and, in fact, the role society plays in keeping women walled in. With *Lingui*, Haroun has created a quiet ode to the women who honour their sacred bonds to one another. By centering a mother and daughter united, instead of characters in opposition, he is able to underline the ways we can support each other in the face of patriarchal tyranny. Maybe this approach is Haroun emphasising that the tyrant doesn't need another megaphone, or a compelling face or backstory, because when we – in art and in life – look to them, we aren't looking to each other.
RŌGAN GRAHAM

Interview by **DAVID JENKINS** *Illustration by* **RAYA DEUSSEN**

Guillermo del Toro

Loves noir, classical storytelling and Bradley Cooper, hates drones. Here, the director discusses the making of Nightmare Alley.

And for his next trick, Mexican maestro Guillermo del Toro returns from the Oscar-haulling success of 2017's *The Shape of Water* with a pristine Art Deco reimagining of William Lindsay Gresham's 1946 novel, 'Nightmare Alley', which was also filmed in 1947 starring Tyrone Power. This time, Bradley Cooper makes the journey from go-getting carnie to society pysychic and back again as the tragic noir monster, Stanton 'Stan' Carlisle in what must be one of del Toro's most personal films.

LWLies: Post *The Shape of Water*, post Oscars, you must've been in a dream position within the industry. Did you feel like you had a bit of a *carte blanche*, where you could pick something out of the drawer – one of those dream projects? Del Toro: I certainly tried. Look, the first thing I present any time is *At the Mountains of Madness*, and I get a really quick 'No.' In fact *Nightmare Alley*, when we tackled it, Kim Morgan and I, we did so as a writing exercise. We didn't think the movie would get made because we knew we wanted that ending, and we knew it would be a big movie, big enough to have to recreate the period with accuracy and scope, so it would not be a small movie. And with that ending, what star would be interested in coming on board for that ending! So we said, 'Look, let's just write it for ourselves and then it'll never happen, but it'll be a great exercise of writing together, you know?' We went and, curiously enough, the studio said, 'We want to make it.' And then Bradley Cooper was absolutely committed. In fact, the way he defined it first, which I love, is he said, 'The whole movie is a preamble to the last two minutes.' I said, 'that's the most beautiful way you could define it,' and we worked ceaselessly together for years to achieve the movie. A career is what happens when you're making other plans, as John Lennon would be paraphrased.

It's story of an artist, and how that artist navigates the world of commercialism and transitions from very small projects to very big projects, it feels like maybe your most autobiographical film. It's my notebook, essentially. That's what it is. I can never make a movie if it doesn't mean something to me. I had just lost my father right after *The Shape of Water*, and I wanted to make a movie that didn't deal with my father anecdotally. The father of Stan is not my father, but I wanted to deal with the idea of the Jungian shadow of 'The Father Figure'. I wanted to deal with a very prescient anxiety I have with the world and truth and lies and the rise of populist speech all over the world. I wanted to talk about 'hoaxterism' and our role in it. After *The Shape of Water*, the one thing that is true is that a whole other world opens, not to do the things you have in the drawer, sadly, but some very tempting large-scale projects. And then your decision is: no. I'm going to do this weird noir with an unhappy ending. How about that? That decision is in my gut, and it's the right decision.

Do you recall your first encounter with the material? Was it the novel or the film? It's such a strange first contact because I was in post-production on *Cronos* and Ron Perlman and I were talking about Elmer Gantry, the Burt Lancaster movie and the book, and we were talking about American realism, the great writers of American realism, Hemingway influencing all the hard-boiled pros. And he said, 'You know, I would always love to play Elmer Gantry, but I couldn't top Lancaster. But there's a novel called Nightmare Alley. Tyrone Power did a version and I think I could be a great Stan. Would you adapt it for me?' I said, 'Sure, let me read it.' And so I read the book, we got a paperback, we saw the VHS version. But back then I was 28 or 29, and what attracted me to the material when I was young was the dark magic and the Tod Browning aspects of the carnival. Which is not at all what attracted me at 56, 57. I was more attracted to the parable of truth and lies as we understand today, right now in this world. It's a movie about today, and it was a completely different read, but the first contact was Ron Perlman and we couldn't do it because it was a Fox library title. They were in a legal dispute I believe back then.

The character of Stanton Carlisle is fascinating and there is this core of ambiguity to him. The way that he's presented – he's doing things that are framed as maybe wrong or immoral

"Noir isn't about Venetian blinds and a husky voiceover and a dimly-lit street. It's not about a dame smoking under a spinning fan. Those are the clichés. Those are the Coca Cola commercials of noir."

or exploitative, but the film and the way you roll out his character, there's always a sense of empathy there. He's a maybe. That's the tragedy – he's a maybe. It's somebody that you hope would do well, but that's essential in noir, you see. You have to see the character make the wrong decisions.

Absolutely. Is this noir? When I first saw the original, I couldn't decide if it was noir or horror. First of all they are very closely related, noir and horror. Aesthetically they both come from expressionism. Second, I believe noir is a vibe. Noir is a sentiment. It's not so much that it has to be in this milieu or that milieu. To me neorealism movies – some of the harder ones – are very close to noir, except they lack a couple of elements.

Noir isn't about Venetian blinds and a husky voiceover and a dimly-lit street. It's not about a dame smoking under a spinning fan. Those are the clichés. Those are the Coca Cola commercials of noir. What I understand to be noir is the real grittiness that comes out of American realism – those films that channel the same spirit as George Bellows or Edward Hopper or Thomas Hart Benton. It's the poetry of disillusionment and existentialism. The tragedy that emerges between the haves and have-nots. And the have-nots are trying to breach their ambition through violence and, ultimately, worshipping a hollow god, which is money. So therefore it's literally an exploration of the flip side of the American Dream.

What has tainted the idea of noir – or classic-era noir – for me is this idea that the only way we can revive it now is through pastiche. And this doesn't feel like pastiche. Bradley was instrumental in seeking out the true thing. I remember one conversation we had, because the patois in the movie is very precise of the period. He said, 'If you want it delivered in a ratatat way, like in '30s movies, then I'm not your guy. I can only exist by making this character real.' And I said, 'We don't want that. What we're going to do – and we need to understand this – is that we'll start with complete almost neorealism in vivid colour and darkness in the carnival, and we'll transition into a lot more style and the suffocating world of the city.

The first encounter in the office between Stan and Lilith must be one of your longest two-person dialogue scenes ever. I normally like to not do much dialogue, and in this movie, what I think is, life can be you doing the same thing over and over again, or trying something new. Sameness leads to madness, variety leads to sanity. I really wanted to tackle a movie where you have the rhythm of a tennis match with Lilith. It's almost like two little plays. It's a movie where I don't need anything more uninterrupted than one single takes and I tried to study the camera style of William Wellman and Wyler and Otto Preminger in their 'faux noirs'. I try to study the quote-unquote simplicity of letting things play, because when I see a period movie, I see people going through all this pain, to go through a simulation of a movie of the time, and then they have a drone shot. Or they have a virtuoso Steadicam shot. That's not the way they would've shot it, so we tried to shoot most of this movie on a crane. The camera is always moving, but most of it is on a classical crane.

Drone shots in period movies are never a good idea. I tell you. For me, the moment a movie shows me a top-down drone shot, I don't like it. Even on things I have produced, I just see the drone.

Following *The Shape of Water* and *Nightmare Alley*, will you round out your Art Deco trilogy? Maybe an Art Deco western? I tell you – and I'm not joking – the two screenplays that I pull out of the drawer every time are *At the Mountains of Madness* and my western version of 'The Count of Monte Cristo'. I'm always pushing those two, and I always hear no

***Nightmare Alley** opens in cinemas on 21 January*

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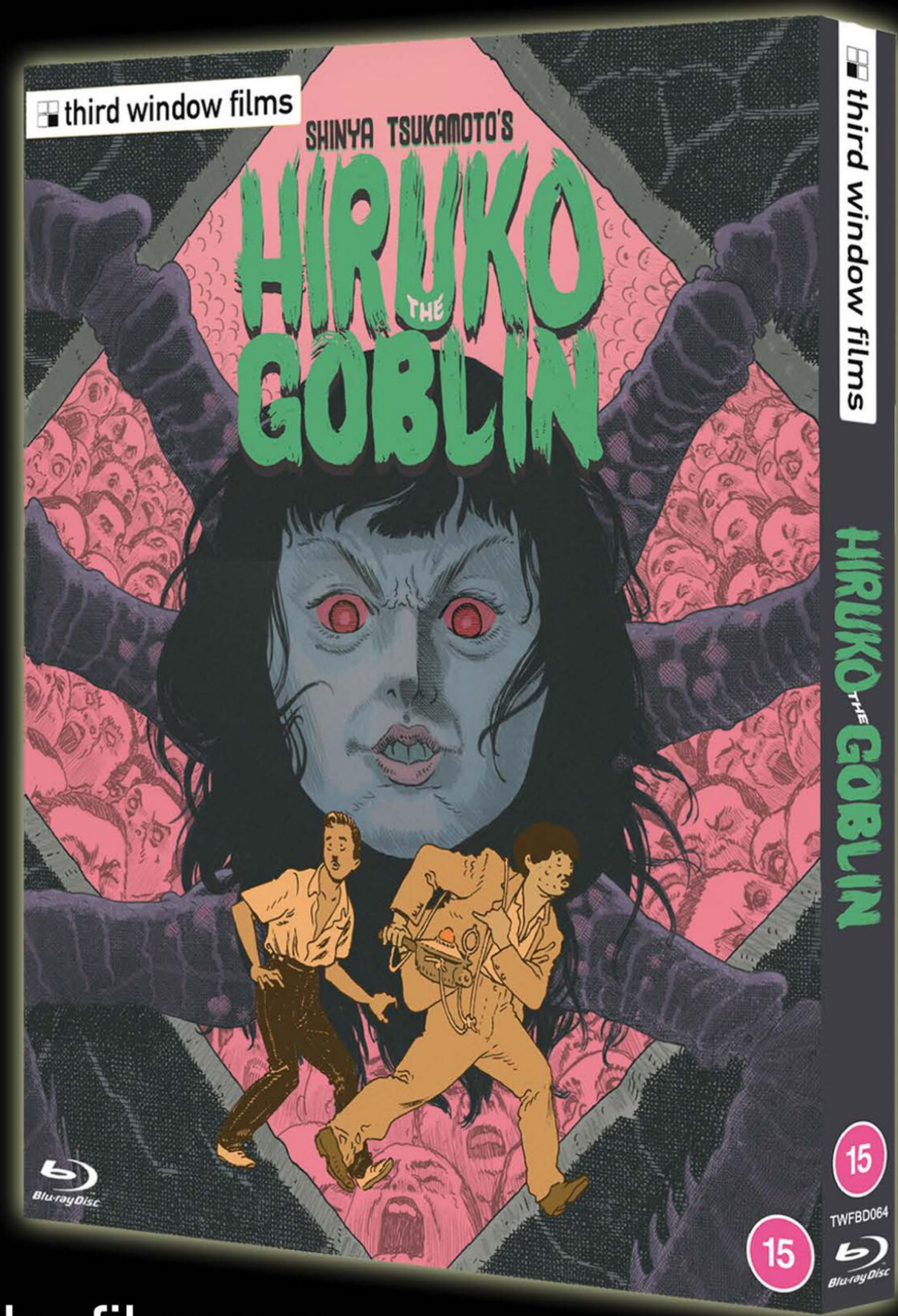

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Ali & Ava

Directed by **CLIO BARNARD**
Starring **CLAIRE RUSHBROOK, ADEEL AKHTAR, ELLORA TORCHIA**
Released **4 MARCH**

ANTICIPATION.
Adeel Ahktar is dynamic in any role, so can't wait to see him here..
3

ENJOYMENT.
A boundary crossing love, underscored by buzzing tunes.
4

IN RETROSPECT.
A tender tale with two brilliant leads, and one of Barnard's finest films to date.
4

Ali and Ava first meet across a rain-soaked school playground. Ali (Adeel Akhtar) is Ava's (Claire Rushbrook) knight in shining armour (or worn tracksuit and beanie), and he innocently offers her a lift home. She tentatively accepts. What unfolds isn't quite Tristan and Isolde, but a romance that is both sweet and refreshingly authentic. Bradford is the backdrop as writer/director Clio Barnard depicts a connection that crosses the boundaries of class, culture, and that great social divider – taste in music.

Powered by dance and electronic music, former-DJ-turned-landlord Ali (Adeel Akhtar) spends his days dropping off and picking up the children of his tenants and presumably collecting rents. Self described as 'over excited', his charming forwardness is in contrast to Ava (Claire Rushbrook). A classroom assistant of Irish heritage, Ava enjoys old-school folk and country music, its lilting tones suiting her meditations and time spent wistfully watching young couples on the bus home. Despite their differences the spark is instant, and the easy chemistry between Rushbrook and Akhtar does a great job of illustrating the very first wisps of attraction – the initial 'clicking' that's not yet ruled romantic, but with an intriguing gravitation that begs to be explored.

Both parties bring baggage to their union. Ali is separated from his wife Runa (played wonderfully by Ellora Torchia), but remains living with her as he fears the consequences of telling his family the truth. Ava is a widowed mother and grandmother who has suffered abuse in the past and is more assured in tending to the desires of others instead of her own. Yet Barnard uses the gradual fusion of their musical tastes to illustrate their journey towards each other both physically and emotionally. Cue scenes of the pair sprawled on Ava's couch chanting 'New Era (Dawning Of A)' by The Specials; Ali's boundless energy giving Ava the push she needs to let herself go, while Ava's warmth gifts Ali the affection he's been missing. Rushbrook brings a vulnerability to Ava that feels incredibly relatable, while Akhtar gives a skillful portrait of a man experiencing both giddy joy and deep despair simultaneously.

Barnard deftly weaves the message of renewal across *Ali & Ava*. Shots across the rooftops at dawn and at night as the city lights glisten in the distance are prevalent throughout the film, as well as Ali's penchant for watching the new moon. Having very much lived lives before finding each other, those experiences adding a familiar weariness that bonds the lovers as much as it threatens to break them apart, faith, in second and even third chances, is crucial.

With *Ali & Ava*, Barnard triumphs in presenting a romance tale that is deeply grounded, yet in its well-matched leads and heartfelt story, still possesses the magic required to sweep the audience off its feet. **CHEYENNE BUNSIE**

Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy

Directed by	**RYŪSUKE HAMAGUCHI**
Starring	**KOTONE FURUKAWA, FUSAKO URABE, AOBA KAWAI**
Released	**11 FEBRUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
After the rich expanse of Drive My Car*, is this portmanteau affair merely a placeholder?*

ENJOYMENT.
An absorbing set of vignettes, though the third section definitely ups the emotional ante.

IN RETROSPECT.
The brief spotlight on these tangled lives leaves us to fill in the bigger picture for ourselves.

Billed in the opening titles as "Short Stories by Ryūsuke Hamaguchi", this packs three different episodes into its two hour runtime, loosely connected by the interaction of chance on human emotions. The usual caveat, that such portmanteau affairs are rarely as satisfying as a single fully-developed narrative, applies here, especially in comparison to the writer/director's marvellous *Drive My Car*. Here though quality control is pleasingly high, and the third of the trio might actually be one of the highlights of the entire Hamaguchi filmography.

Classical solo piano from Schumann's 'Scenes of Childhood' establishes a mood of wistful reverie as the opening story *Magic (or Something Less Assuring)* introduces us to a bob-haired model posing by a Tokyo roadside, before taking in a good girly chat with her best friend/assistant. Turns out, however, the former is hiding the fact that she and her pal's potential new boyfriend have history together, and maybe their split isn't as final as he'd been suggesting. Pouty and capricious, this gal is exasperatingly unpredictable, even to herself. Hamaguchi is in no hurry to condemn, instead his camera is a cool observer, registering how it's taken an unexpected coincidence to bring matters to a heady confrontation with the guy. Still, the closing image of the massive building site that is downtown Shibuya suggests these tangled lives may yet be a work in progress after all.

It's a piquant, intriguing beginning, if not exactly a slam-dunk, and the second segment continues in a similar absorbing, if not quite overwhelming vein. Here *Door Wide Open* refers to a university professor who receives an unexpected visit from a mature former female student, surreptitiously scheming with a disgruntled fellow classmate (whose graduation the prof had blocked) to entrap him. His office door closes, albeit briefly, as her plan springs into action, though the academic proves surprisingly insightful that her sexual forthrightness suggest a personal liberation at odds with Japan's conservative social mores. A seemingly cruel subsequent reversal notwithstanding, Hamaguchi's sympathies for another contrary feminine outsider prove even more evident here, a theme followed through to the film's closing – and best – section, *Any Day Now*.

The dystopian sci-fi set-up introduces us to world where a haywire email virus has sent everyone back to snailmail and landlines, yet what we get is a captivating bijou encounter, where two thirtysomething women think they recognise each other from high school days. A fateful glide-by on an escalator at Sendai station spurs an afternoon of memories and revelations, exposing disappointment and vulnerability – as events take on the character of role-playing in a self-described "dramatic meeting". It's a quintessential example of Hamaguchi's striking skill at shaping a momentary construct which somehow allows piercingly truthful intimacy to emerge, beautifully performed by Fusako Urabe and Aoba Kawai, and leaving us to ponder the characters' subsequent pathways as the film's explosion of feeling lingers in our imagination. Definitely peak Hamaguchi, and it makes this a must-see. **TREVOR JOHNSTON**

Belfast

Directed by **KENNETH BRANAGH**
Starring **CAITRÍONA BALFE, JAMIE DORNAN, JUDE HILL**
Released **21 JANUARY**

After spending a few years punching out lacklustre studio blockbusters, Kenneth Branagh has opted for a more personal project in *Belfast*, a drama based on his own experiences growing up in the Northern Irish capital amid flaring tensions between Catholics and Protestants. Nine-year-old Buddy (Jude Hill) enjoys his simple life in the city with his Ma (Caitríona Balfe), older brother Will (Lewis McAskie), Granny (Judi Dench) and Pops (Ciarán Hinds), while his Pa (Jamie Dornan) is frequently away working in England. When Pa returns, it becomes clear that the situation in the city is escalating, with Protestants inflicting intimidation and violence on Catholics in their own neighbourhood. When local gang leaders attempt to recruit Pa into their campaign of terror, he resists and inadvertantly places a target on his back.

Shot in black-and-white (with occasional flashes of colour, such as in the film's opening and when Buddy visits the cinema with his family) it seems as if Branagh may have been influenced by the success of Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma,* which similarly drew on formative memories to create a portrait of a family facing upheaval. Unfortunately the impact here is rather more dreary; it feels like a shortcut for evoking a sense of nostalgia that adds precious little to the film itself. Uninspired, too, are the rather generic adventures Buddy undergoes: he develops a crush on a classmate; he falls in love with an older girl who is a bad influence; he is spellbound by a trip to see *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang,* in a direct nod to Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso*.

Branagh paints with the broadest strokes and his film is all the worse for it. It doesn't have anything unique to say about this turbulent time in Northern Ireland's history which is still cause of contention to this day. It doesn't help that Hill is a jarring lead whose acting feels overwrought; Balfe and Dornan are much more agreeable presences, but given decided less to do as Branagh is so caught up in this child's eye perspective. A scene in which Dornan performs 'Everlasting Love' should have an emotional kick to it, but for reasons unknown Branagh lacks the courage to let the sequence play out in its entirety.

The subject matter is clearly close to Branagh's heart, yet the final product is a disappointingly opaque and grating melodrama which ends up closer to pastiche than tender memoir. In an effort to create a crowd-pleasing story of youthful exuberance in the face of adversity, the director seems afraid to think big, and *Belfast* suffers for it. This story about growing up amid the onset of The Troubles should be more emotionally and politically potent than it is. Instead, it's a careful, uncontroversial (and thereby unremarkable) film that fails to exert any lasting impact after the credits roll. **HANNAH STRONG**

ANTICIPATION. 3
Branagh is one of the UK's most inconsistent directors.

ENJOYMENT. 2
Looks like someone enjoyed Roma *a bit too much.*

IN RETROSPECT. 2
A syrupy memoir offering little insight into a turbulent time..

Zeros and Ones

Directed by	**ABEL FERRARA**
Starring	**ETHAN HAWKE, CRISTINA CHIRIAC, PHIL NEILSON**
Released	**11 FEBRUARY**

ANTICIPATION.
The dream scenario of Abel Ferarra directing Ethan Hawke.

ENJOYMENT.
A haunting landscape of shadow figures in Covid-era lockdown Rome.

IN RETROSPECT.
An elliptical, striking piece of genre subversion that is unflinchingly incomplete.

"Shoot it so they believe it." The cryptic words of a shadowy American military officer reflect how all forms of manipulation (digital, sexual, ideological, political) pervade Abel Ferrara's *Zeros and Ones* – so much so that it has become nearly impossible to discern façade from reality. This motif is echoed in the strange FYC-style interviews that bookend the film in which star Ethan Hawke slyly skewers the emotional arc that publicists hope audience members will feel when auteurism and performance harmoniously collide.

Ferrara and Hawke's true goal seems to be far more immersive and experimental. Set almost entirely under a crescent moon in lockdown-era Rome, *Zeros and Ones* begins with the arrival of masked special operative named JJ (Hawke), who exits a commuter train and walks the empty streets of a city under siege of some invisible Covid-like virus. DoP Sean Price Williams shoots these urban spaces with maximum pixilation, grain and texture while stripping away almost all color. Hyper slow motion moments echo Dion Beebe's digital work with Michael Mann, while elegiac drone shots fly slowly above like angels on high.

Assigned to investigate the disappearance of his twin brother Justin, a powerful revolutionary who is plotting an attack on the Vatican, JJ navigates Ferarra's dank underworld as something of a surveyor trying to map an unpredictable landscape. During fractured vignettes inside drug dens and religious sanctuaries, Hawke's cipher witnesses the zeal and influence of his Christ figure twin. At one point, he views a secretly filmed interrogation that becomes one of many videos captured by clandestine filmmakers, Ferarra's accomplices in crafting a genre space that's crumbling under the weight of its own indecipherable narrative.

Those looking for your standard issue thriller plot will be deeply disappointed with *Zeros and Ones*, a film that unabashedly denies any level of logical coherence in favor hyper realized tones, moods, and striking imagery. One sequence in which JJ is forced into bed with a character simply named Laughing Russian Agent (Cristina Chiriac), their naked bodies are transformed into caressing heat signatures, a sublime piece of avant garde cinema in an era dominated by fear of feverish sickness and ideology. Known for making films that confront our seediest desires, violent impulses and crippling addictions, Ferarra is one of the few American directors who could be described as truly independent. That sentiment is mirrored in one bit of voice over where JJ (or possibly his brother) cites the dying words of St. Francis. "The hard road leads to a real life."

Zeros and Ones is indeed a hard film. It may examine a kaleidoscope of themes and scenarios, from religious fundamentalism to genre subversion, but its core spirit remains connected to collisions of sound and fury that, while ephemeral, leave a lasting imprint. Together, Ferarra, Hawke, and their filmmaking collaborators fearlessly acknowledge the great isolation and alienation that has engulfed us all in the last year, and in doing so open a hypnotically strange portal into s omething resembling the future. **GLENN HEATH JR**

Lies and Deceit: Five Films by Claude Chabrol

Directed by	**CLAUDE CHABROL**
Starring	**JEAN POIRET, ISABELLE HUPPERT, EMMANUELLE BÉART**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **21 JAN**

This is the first worthwhile set of Blu-rays from French New Wave stalwart Claude Chabrol, yet these five titles represent a mere blip on the scope of his astronomical output. And, to be frank, it's a little bit of an odd mix, even though everything here easily sits in the upper tier of the filmmaker's often underrated personal pantheon. *Cop au Vin* (1984) and *Inspector Lavardin* (1985) are engrossing detective stories which centre around the morally suspect and sometimes disconcertingly mean Jean Lavardin (Jean Poiret). Isabelle Huppert leads his down-the-line but affecting 1991 adaptation of Gustave Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary', which whips up the sexual torments of the eternally suffering wife with admirable economy and verve.

The following year he delivered an atypical, close-quarters character portrait in *Betty*, which offers perhaps the greatest showcase for the talents of the late, very great Marie Trintignant. And to round thing's off is 1994 *L'Enfer*, billed here as *Torment*, which is Chabrol's take on Henri-Georges Clouzot's abandoned film about a jealous hotelier (François Cluzet) who is driven to psychosis at the thought he is being cheated on by his glamorous wife (Emmanuelle Béart). Though these are all from the later half of his career, this actually offers a very good entry point into the work of a director who could mine the most tragic of human follies with the absolute lightest of touches. **DAVID JENKINS**

Hiruko the Goblin

Directed by	**SHINYA TSUKAMOTO**
Starring	**KENJI SAWADA, MASAKI KUDOU, HIDEO MUROTA**

Blu-ray/DVD	*Released* **24 JAN**

Two years after his low budget underground hit *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), Shinya Tsukamoto returned with a studio-backed adaptation of Daijiro Morohoshi's 'Yokai Hunter' manga. A more conventional film than the cyberpunk body horror classic with which Tsukamoto made his name, *Hiruko the Goblin* nevertheless retains a degree of the strangeness that should be expected from the always-distinctive director, mixing broad, campish humour with more gruesome moments, all to pleasingly discordant and unpredictable effect.

Reijirou Hieda (Kenji Sawada) is an archaeologist with a penchant for the supernatural, so travels to a school built on the site of an ancient tomb. He teams up with student Masao Yabe (Masaki Kudou) to find out why people are starting to inexplicably disappear. Turns out the place is a portal to Hell, and they come under attack from the demonic entity of the title.

Unlike Tetsuo, which feels like a world all of Tsukamoto's own creation, with *Hiruko the Goblin*, the director brings a number of reference points into collision, creating a film that evokes early Sam Raimi and John Carpenter films through its stylistic flourishes and sense of spectacle, and Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters* in its often very goofy tone. This means that the film, as entertaining as it may be, feels less like an underseen classic and more like a diverting oddity. **MATT TURNER**

1981

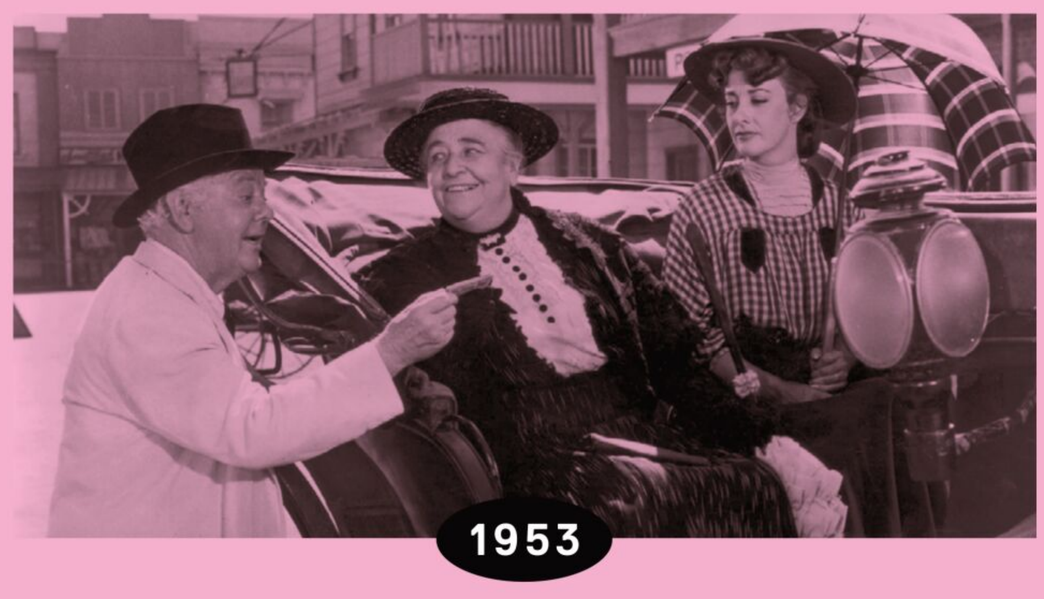
Galaxy of Terror

Directed by **BRUCE D CLARK**
Starring **ROBERT ENGLUND, ERIN MORAN, SID HAIG**

Blu-ray/DVD | *Released* **21 FEB**

If you've been hankering to see Richie Cunningham's sis from *Happy Days*, Joanie, later the star of spin-off series *Joanie Loves Chachi*, have her face sliced to pieces by a shape-shifting space monster, then you're in luck. *Galaxy of Terror* is Bruce D Clark's schlock horror sci-fi opus in which a hapless crew are posted to the mysterious planet (not galaxy) Morganthus where terror awaits them in the form of their own personal fears. Alongside Erin "Joanie" Moran, you've got Robert Englund, Grace Zabriskie, Sid Haig and even the softcore maestro himself Zalman King as they battle against a shape-shifting being that just happens to capture them all alone so we can lavish in another inventively gory set-piece.

Jacked-up Haig as Quuhod has his arm sliced off with his own death star-like weapon, while Moran's Alluna is wrapped up in tentacles and crushed to pieces. The film putters on with the happy-go-lucky, logic-free energy of most 1980s productions bearing the name of Roger Corman, and the obvious laser-focus on a litany of eccentrically over-the-top death sequences certainly means the entertainment stakes are on the higher end of the scale. Even though it wasn't banned, it's certainly superior to most of the 'Video Nasties' coming out at the same time, particularly due to the fact that it's quite obviously not taking itself very seriously at all. **DAVID JENKINS**



1953

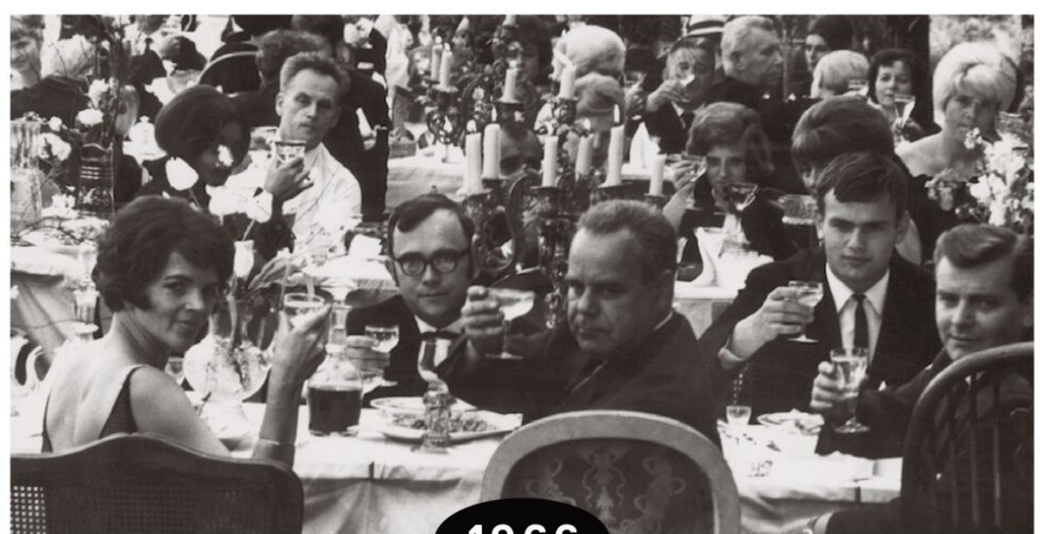
The Sun Shines Bright

Directed by **JOHN FORD**
Starring **CHARLES WINNINGER, ARLEEN WHELAN, JOHN RUSSELL**

Blu-ray | *Released* **24 JAN**

As far as John Ford's films go, *The Sun Shines Bright* is a humble, sentimental film, though it is nevertheless very affecting. Cobbled together from several newspaper serials that Irvin S. Cobb wrote around the turn of the century, *The Sun Shines Bright* is made up of an assortment of minor stories that build cumulatively through to a more dramatic finale. Charles Winninger plays William Priest who is running to remain the judge of Fairfield, Kentucky, and encounters a series of situations that call upon him to choose between the correct and moral course of action and the one that would ensure re-election. In each instance, he follows a virtuous path, breaking up a fight before it turns nasty, accosting a mob to prevent a lynching, and attending the funeral procession of a fallen lady.

If this makes the film sound simple and moralistic, it is not. Its Southern setting in the post-reconstruction period means that each interaction proves thornier than would be predicted, with various battles unfolding between the tides of progressivism and more reactionary forms of nostalgia. Regarded as a favourite of the director amongst his own works, *The Sun Shines Bright* is a rare thing: a film that seems modest but is actually major, graceful and moving in its growing momentum formed out of gradually unfolding layers. **MATT TURNER**



1966

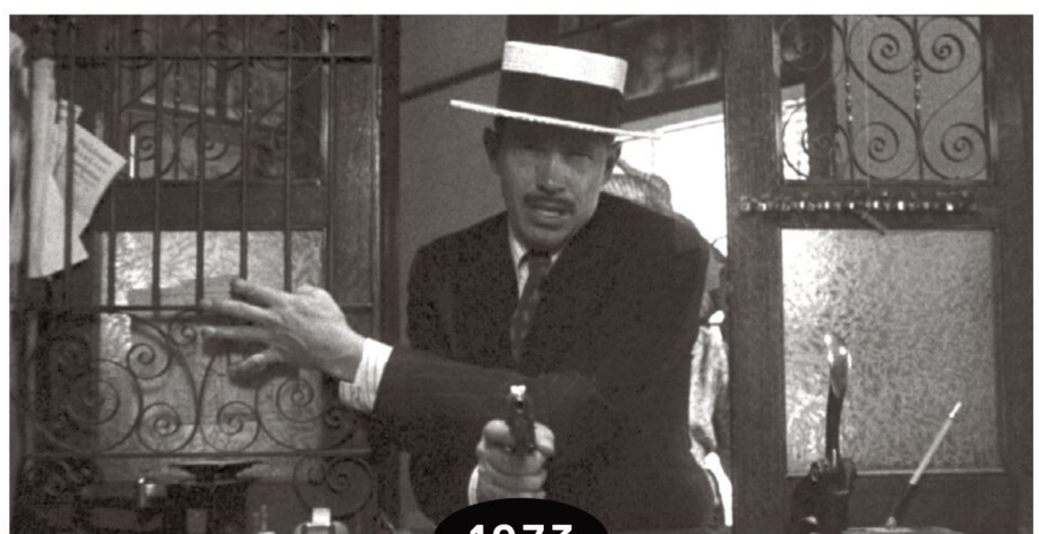
The Party and the Guests

Directed by **JAN NĚMEC**
Starring **JAN KLUSÁK, KAREL MARES, IVAN VYSKOCIL**

Blu-ray	*Released* **31 JAN**

Banned at the time of its release by Czech authorities for its bitter lampooning of life under communism, Jan Němec's second feature nevertheless lands its blows with a breezy, soft-spoken calm which serves to make its purpose more chilling. A gaggle of well-to-do friends sit in a woodland clearing, munch cake and drink brandy without a care in the world. Then, from out of the bushes comes a gang of brutish men who coerce them to join their malevolent theatrical game. A suited authority figure emerges to break things up, inviting the group to a lavish feast, but his apparent cordiality soon gives way to aggression as organisational standards are far from exacting.

Němec's follow-up to his startling 1964 debut, *Diamonds in the Night*, plays like a piece of sculpted experimental theatre where notions of freedom being taken away are captured mannered line delivery, editing and framing. It's a film about how political systems are mis-sold to the people as a fun frolic, and that once you are inside them you're at the complete beck and call of the hot-headed host. Hinting at the horrific intimations of the material is Jan Klusák's Rudolf, a jester-like henchman who possesses the power of manipulation, as well as a desire to fix problems with the most extreme solutions. This new Blu-ray offers a new restoration of this slight but invigourating work on the insidious spectre of oppression. **DAVID JENKINS**



1973

Dillinger

Directed by **JOHN MILIUS**
Starring **WARREN OATES, BEN JOHNSON, HARRY DEAN STANTON**

Blu-ray	*Released* **3 JAN**

This is the squalid flipside to a film like Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*. Gone is the self-conscious folk hero patter, the slick threads, the logical moral compass, and the production of two very good looking corpses. In its place, a flop-sweat doused Warren Oates as Depression-era celebrity criminal John Dillinger, a bank robber par excellence whose gentlemanly, non-violent manner has caused him to walk between the raindrops of federal scrutiny. The screws come down on him hard following a 1933 massacre where numerous FBI agents were murdered (he was not involved), and cigar-chomping field chief Melvin Purvis (Ben Johnson) opts to use this as an excuse to whack some of the high-flying names's on the government's most wanted list.

The film follows Dillinger and his rag-tag crew as they pull off various heists more as a way to augment their notoriety in the media than a desire for money. Oates does well to make this antihero something more than just a lovable rogue, dashing the derring do through with moments of depressing violence. This was writer/director John Milius' debut feature, and it works as a showcase for both his distrust of the power elite and his love of artillery of all storts. As the film edges towards its climax and the net tightens on Dillinger, we're gifted numerous, sharply choreographed shoot-out sequences that paint both cops and robbers as dastardly, trigger-happy tyrants. **DAVID JENKINS**

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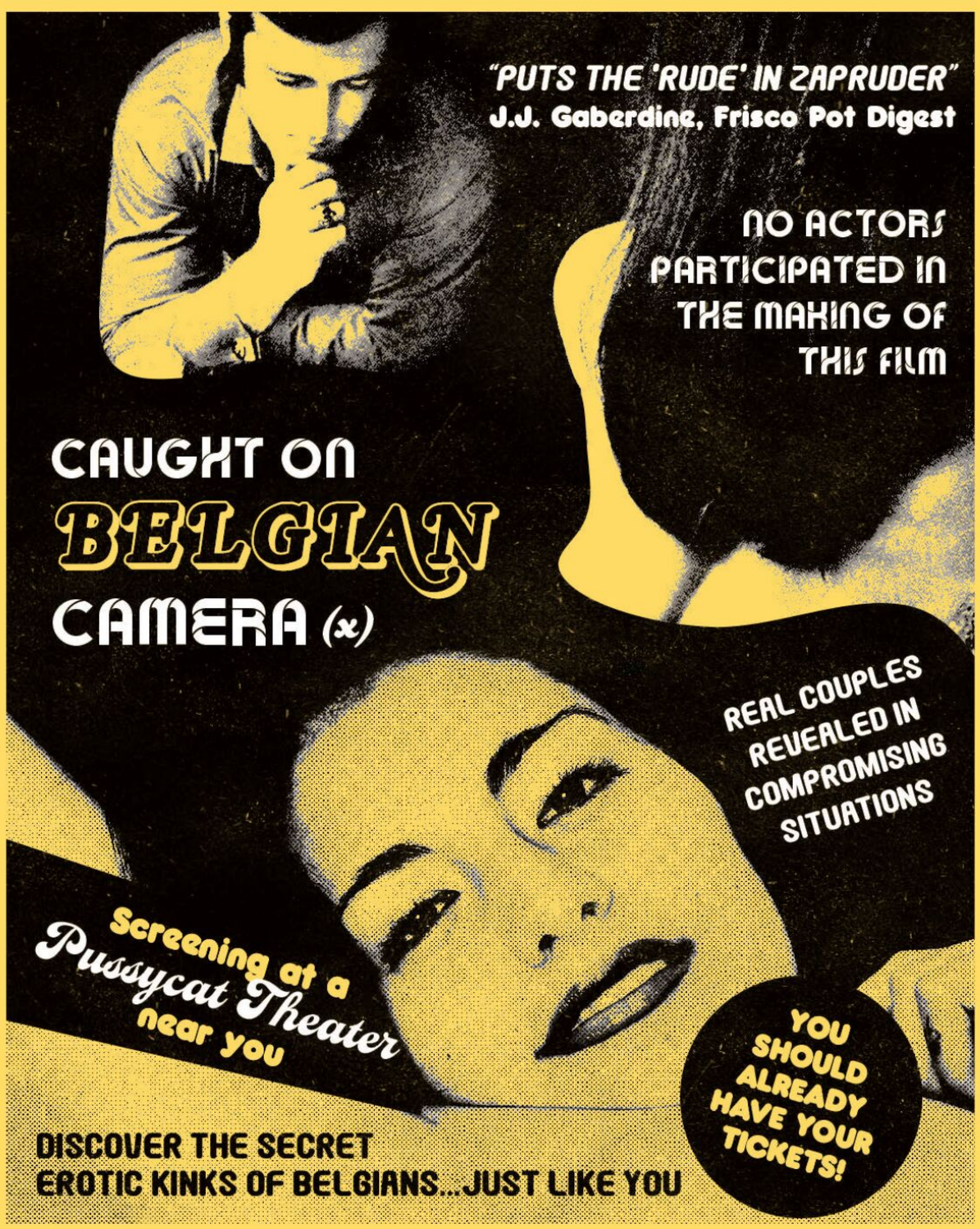

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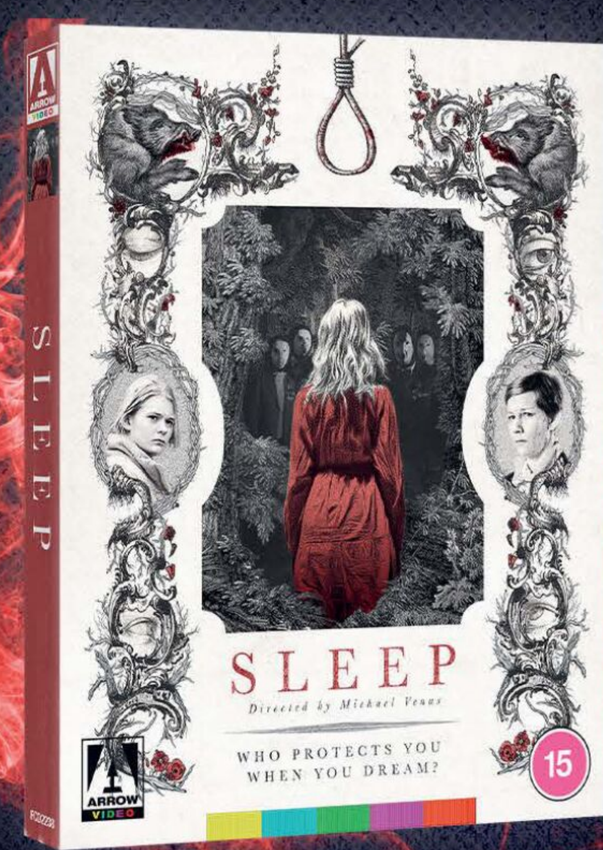

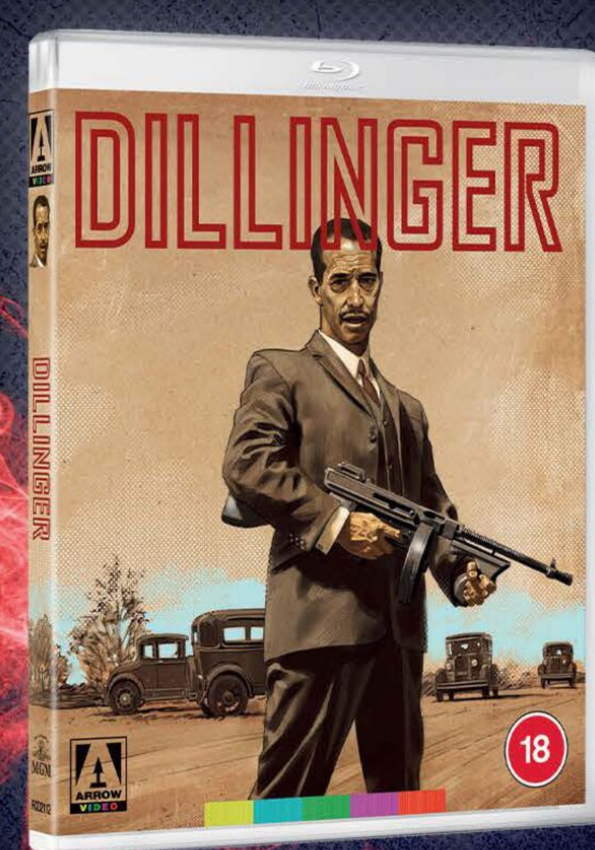

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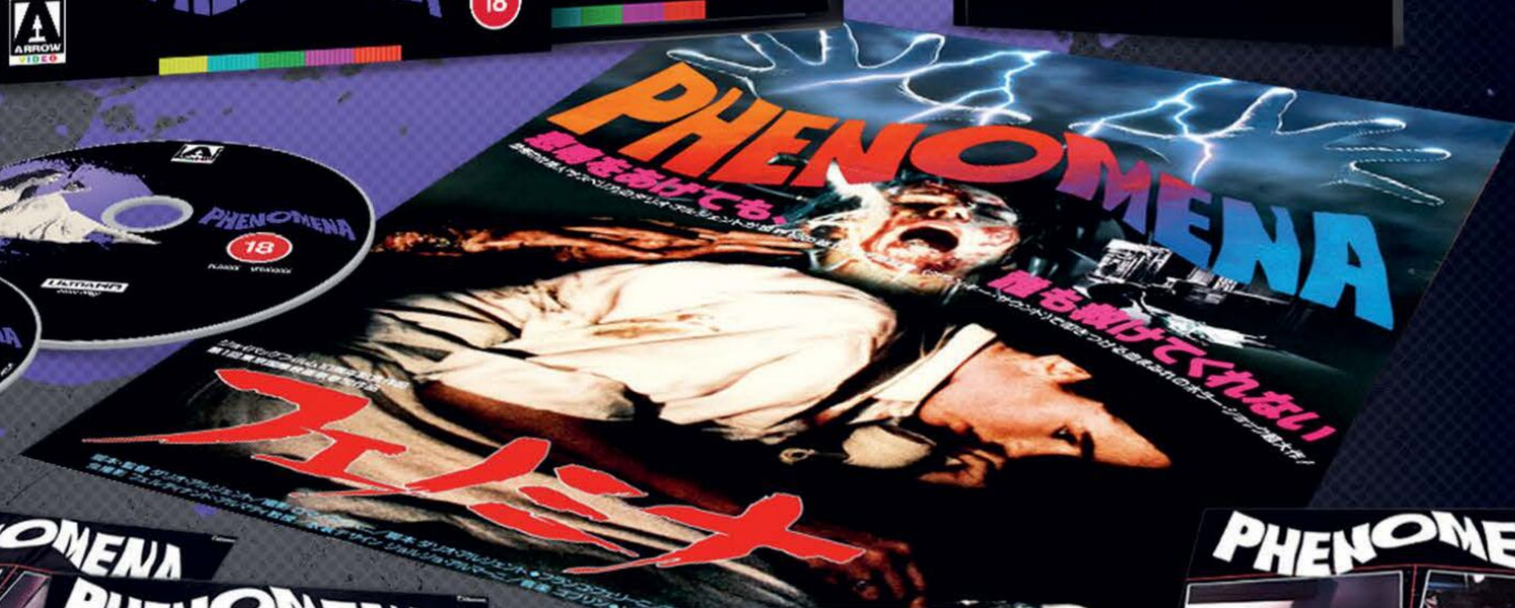

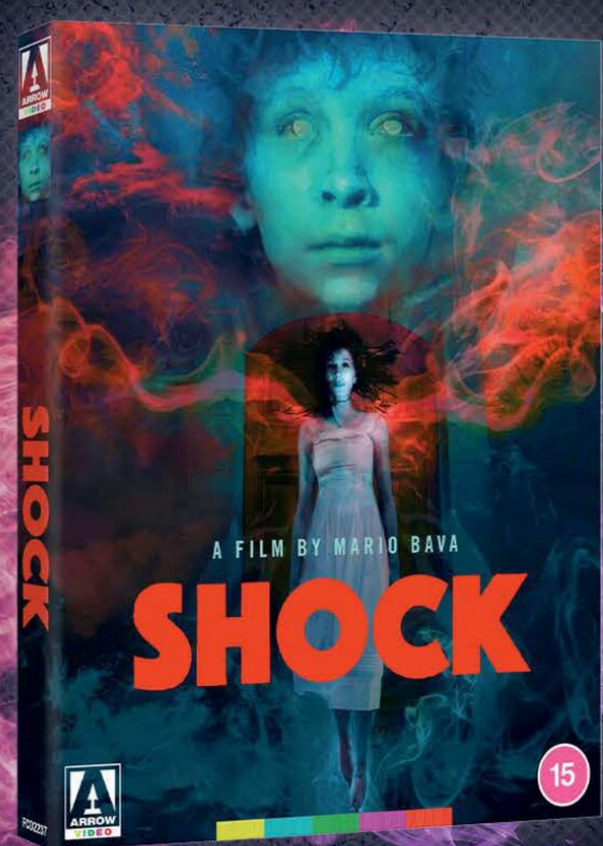

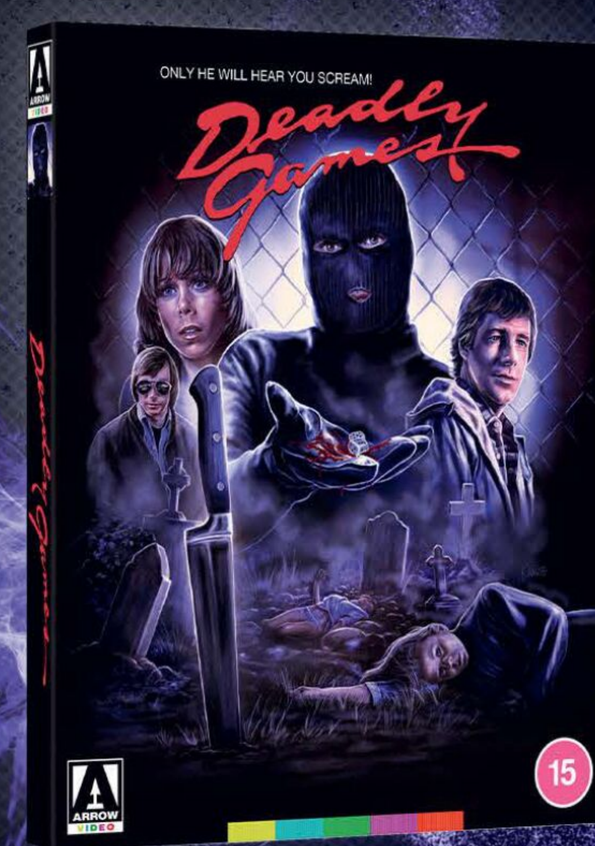

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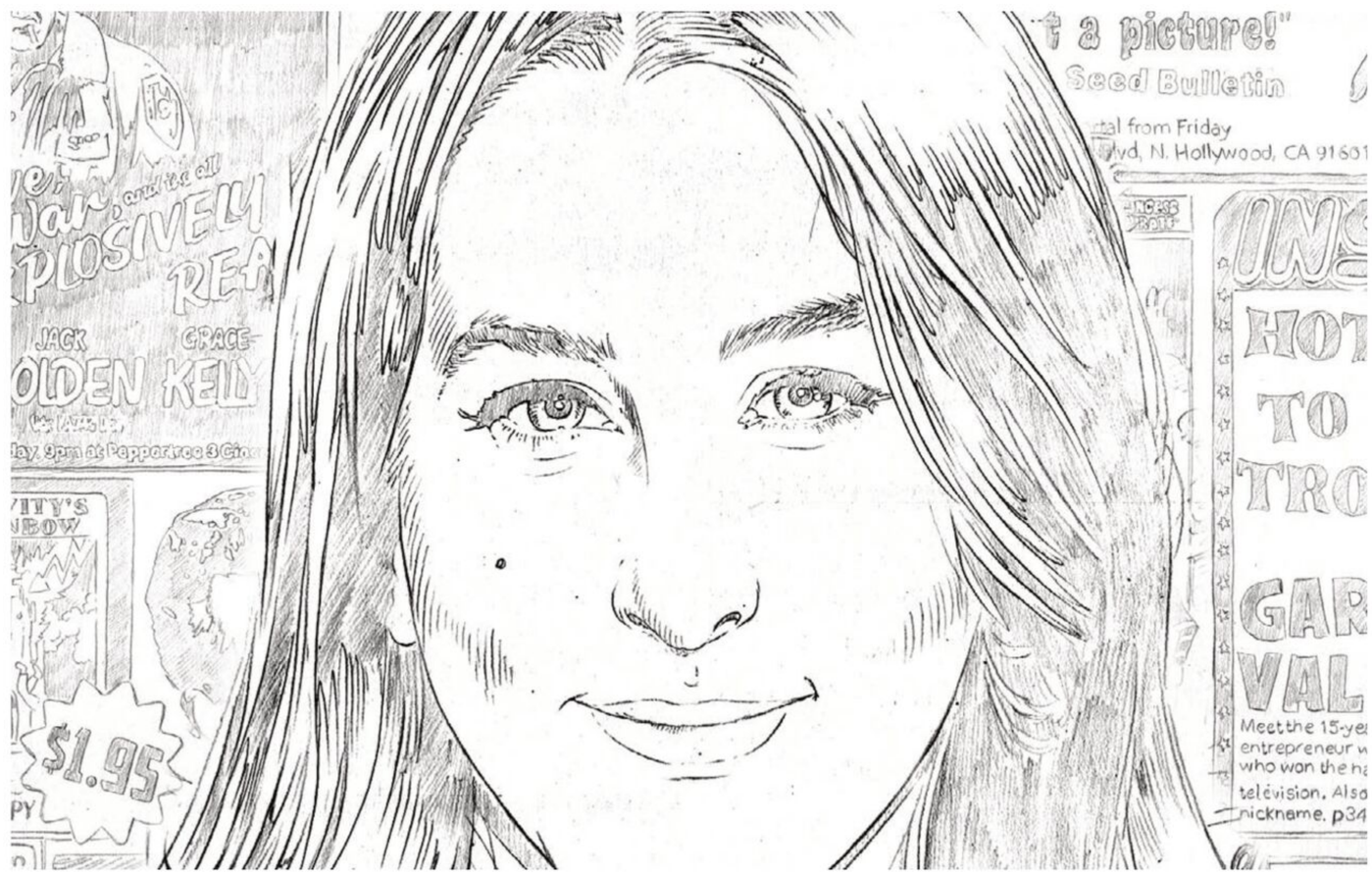

On the cover

Tim McDonagh is an illustrator living and working in the south of England. “It was a real pleasure working on this cover as squeezing in little details and taking up all the space in illustrations is what I love doing best. I don’t often have the chance to mess around with typefaces either so drawing this one up and being a big PTA fan made it into a real dream.”

instagram: @timdrawsinink

Little White Lies

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Illustrators

Beth Fenton is a self-taught illustrator based in London. Beth is known for her portraiture work using pencils and digital airbrushes to capture subjects.

Beth Morris is a Welsh artist and graphic designer living in Cardiff. She is particularly fond of retro design and collage.

Nick Taylor is an illustrator and designer based in Nottinghamshire. He combines his love of drawing, collage, mark-making and printing with digital techniques. He is an avid music fan and record collector and co-hosts a radio show on Slack City in Brighton.

Raya Deussen is an illustrator based in Portland, Oregon. She enjoys working with digital and traditional mediums, and is finding her voice through art.

Jess Alexander has been a graphic designer in film for over 10 years, more recently branching out as a freelance illustrator. She lives in London and is a serial hoarder of twentieth-century ephemera.

Jake Smithies is an illustrator and musician based in Sheffield, UK, who works in a monochromatic vintage style. Currently with a main focus on Cowboys.

Simon Hayes is a London -based designer and illustrator who loves to merge his disciplines by creating graphical illustrations through playful typography and a heavy light and shade contrast.

Stéphanie Sergeant is a French illustrator/animator living and working in Poland. She mostly works with watercolour and animates in 2D. She likes spaghetti and the dark, long process of animation.

Feature writers

Adam Lee Davies played Lemuel Cruz-Campo in this issue, and is a Tinseltown aficionado who writes under such *noms-de-guerr*e as Anatole Du Lac, Napier Southfork and 'Mohair' Dan Pensky. His writing has appeared in *Time Out London*, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Times* and *Creative Review*.

Ingrid Ege (they/she/he) played Flowers Foster in this issue, and is a writer from Turkey who is now based in Germany. They have an MFA from University of Washington, Seattle, and they're directing their first short film, *The Islands Above*, in 2022.

Christina Newland played herself in this issue and is the lead film critic at the *i Paper* and a journalist on film, pop culture, and boxing at VICE, *Sight & Sound*, *BBC*, *MUBI*, *Empire*, and others. Her first book, an edited anthology called 'She Found It at the Movies: Women Writers on Sex, Desire and Cinema', was published in March 2020. She tweets at @christinalefou.

Paul Fairclough played Jacques Gites in this issue, is editor of BFI Video's print output and a journalist who has written for *Monocle*, *Sight & Sound* and *Time Out London*. He is the author of the 2003 biography of controversial film critic Jacques Gites, 'I'd Rather Jacques', which was nominated for a Bad Sex Award.

Soma Ghosh played Cady Chrysler in this issue, and is a writer, performer and critic, who writes film features for *The Quietus*, *Little White Lies*, *The Companion App* and more. She hosts the feminist, multi-cultural film podcast, 'What Goddesses Watch', and is Editor of arts magazine *The Demented Goddess*.

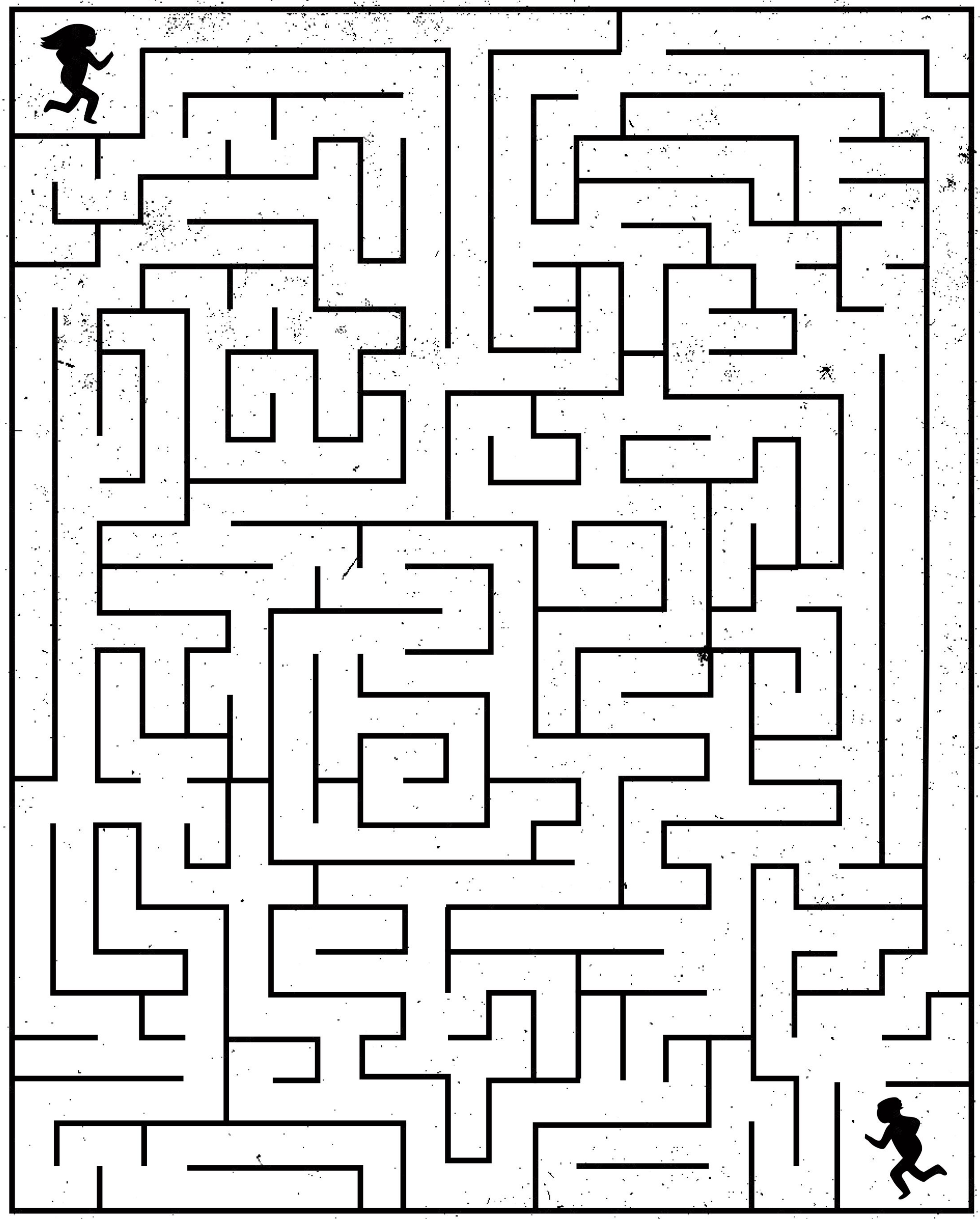
Caroline Golum played the role of Laurel Canyon in this issue and is a filmmaker and writer living in Brooklyn, NY. When she is not working for the Man, she is usually at, writing about, or trying to make a movie. You can follow her on Twitter @carolineavenue.

Additional credits

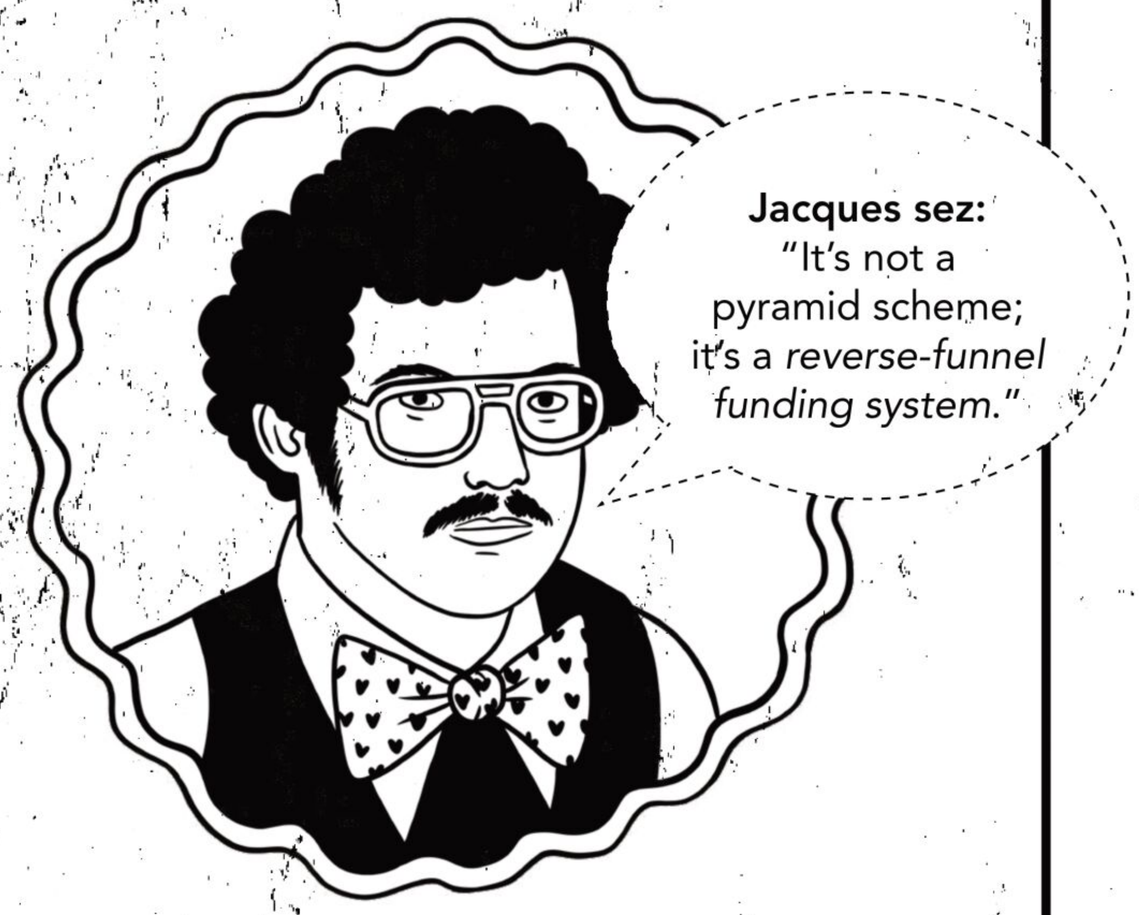
Charles Bramesco played H. Morris Malliard, Ronnie Zolondek and himself in this issue.

Tom Huddleston played Mr Zero in this issue and set the crossword.

David Jenkins played Fletch Bagley, Curtis Brotherchild, Jacques Gites (What's On At the Cinema) and himself in this issue.



FINAL THOUGHT...



Find True Love in the Valley

Trace a line through the darkened backstreets of the San Fernando Valley to connect Alana and Gary after a night of soul-searching and sprinting. Try to make it out of the maze, but most importantly, please, have fun while you're doing it.

Continue your cinematic pleasure cruise...

A 1973 Movie Playlist
By LWLies staff

(Alphabetical)
Amarcord
American Graffiti
Badlands
Belladonna of Sadness
Breezy
Charley Varrick
Coffy
Don't Look Now
Enter the Dragon
The Exorcist
F For Fake
The Friends of Eddie Coyle
Ganja & Hess
Illumination
The Iron Rose
Juvenile Court
Lady Snowblood
The Last Detail
The Long Goodbye
Mean Streets
The Mother and the Whore
The Offence
O Lucky Man
Paper Moon
Scenes from a Marriage
Sisters
The Spirit of the Beehive
Touki-Bouki
World on a Wire
(Ends)

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